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THE LOST CHILD

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THE LOST CHILD

by

RAHEL SANZARA

Translated from the German by
Winifred Katzin

LONDON
VICTOR GOLLANCZ LTD
14 Henrietta Street Covent Garden
1930

Printed in Great Britain by
The Camelot Press Ltd., London and Southampton
on paper supplied by Spalding & Hodge Ltd.
and bound by The Leighton-Straker Bookbinding Co. Ltd.

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CHAPTER I

During the second half of the last century, Christian Scheffel was the tenant of the vast farm property of Treuen, in the north of Germany, near Ostenwald. The younger son of a wealthy peasant of Freiengard, in the same district, a few days' journey from Treuen, he had left his home at a very early age.

At the time of his birth, his two brothers, already grown men, helped their father on the farm. His mother had died soon after he was born ; he had never known her.

His father intended to educate his youngest son with an eye towards the ministry or teaching. Accordingly, when Christian was ten years old, he was sent to school to the nearest town. He was always the best pupil in his classes ; a grave, quiet, unassuming child who made friends easily. He never knew the sorrows, adversities and disappointments which almost inevitably come to most children. His happiness was never achieved at the expense of others. Nor was he ever homesick ; an earnest worker, whose ambition, however, never disturbed the quiet tenor of his ways ; a religious child bred in the firm beliefs of his age, he prayed humbly, but with an unqualified faith in God, an implicit attitude of familiarity that took the Creator for granted.

He was fourteen years old when he began to fear the dark. A weird, unaccountable fear. It first came over him as he stood late one night at his bedroom window. One of his friends had been dangerously ill for a long time ; now he was out of danger ; Christian could not sleep for happiness. His heart beat fast within him ; he could still feel the touch of the sick boy's hand pressing his own, feebly, yet with a great joy in the sense of returning life. The recollection roused in Christian a very tempest

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of emotion, a passionate fore-knowledge of love which moved him to the depths of his being. Hitherto, he had quite calmly accepted friendship ; now he was learning to give it ; and in that moment Christian, the boy, had a foretaste, received divine intimations, of the love he was destined to know. It was purely spiritual, yet physically it affected him with a buoyancy of joy. And, strangest of all, this joy brought with it an uncanny fear. It was a dark night without a moon in the heaven ; a black, terrifying night. Around him, all his comrades were fast asleep ; he could not see them, but he could hear them breathing. Darkness lay about them too, enveloping them in a shroud of black ; but that darkness was different from his ; it was a clear, luminous darkness. Christian's darkness clung to him, stuck like a second skin over his own. He still tingled with the joy he had felt, but now this darkness wrapped itself tight about him, coursed through his veins as his blood ; it was an evil, menacing, impalpable power, stifling his ecstasy. It numbed his heart with a nameless terror, it paralysed his mind as he sought to turn his thought to God, Who hitherto had answered his every prayer. It held him rooted to his place, lost in terror, abandoned utterly to a foreboding he could not explain. Then, he saw it was morning ; the sun shone ; all was bright . . . beautiful. . . .

Christian's schooldays were drawing to an end ; the leaving examinations impended, when suddenly his father died. The news came too abruptly for him to grasp completely the significance of the event ; he was stunned and hurt rather than deeply grieved, as he made ready for the return homeward.

On the eve of his departure, as he walked under the street lights, hurrying dully through the early autumn dusk, a woman brushed against him and sped past. Her face, dead white, rose out of the darkness, loomed so near that he could feel her breath upon his cheek. Her thick black hair fell low over her forehead ; her black eyes poured their darkness into his. When he could decently do

so, he turned about and saw only a woman of medium height dressed in grey, hastening down the street in the twilight. But the glance she had darted upon him riveted him to the spot and followed him to his bed that night. He could feel it fastened upon him through the night ; in it, he recognised the darkness he had feared as a child.

Christian never saw his father's face again. When he reached home on the morrow, they had already nailed down the coffin. The funeral took place at noon next day ; on the day after, the will was read, its provisions were carried out.

The farm was prosperous and free from debt ; and in addition old Scheffel had left twenty-one thousand marks. The money went to the two youngest, to Christian and to his sister Klara, the old man's only daughter. Making use of their wives' dowries, the elder children decided to buy the small share of the farm that had been left to their juniors. They wished to own the whole place themselves.

But Christian never returned to town. His home claimed him ; he was one with the fragrance of earth, with the sharp, clean odour of animals ; he enjoyed the company of countryfolk, tall silent men, peaceful as himself. So he stayed on with his brothers, forgot the knowledge he had been acquiring over so many years, concealed his scholarship. For two years, he worked for his brothers as a farmhand, doing the hardest possible labour in return for wages and bread. Then, one day in autumn, he left home to explore the countryside. And when he returned a month later, although he was then only twenty-two years old, he had become tenant of the vacant farm at Treuen. His brothers strongly disapproved. They admitted that the rent was not high but the farm, part of a vast estate which extended to the border of the country, had for decades been handed down from tenant to tenant. As a result, its buildings were dilapidated, its equipment worn out, and its soil exhausted. In fact, it had so deteriorated, that unless the new tenant was willing to invest his own money in restoring it, it was highly doubtful whether it could yield

the price of its rental. Undaunted, Christian moved in on the first of the year. In the beginning, life was hard ; the farm took his whole strength, his whole time. The property was extensive, with limitless possibilities for development. Christian threw himself into the task with all the exuberance of youth, rejoicing in the work rather than in what it might bring him. He got leave to build new sheds and barns, to put up various workshops in the abandoned cottages ; he even obtained special permission to cut down large trees in the private forest belonging to the estate. He put his last penny into the place ; in time it became the finest in the countryside. By the time he was twenty-seven, he had covered his rent and expenses, owned two wagons and a fine team, and was providing work, food and lodging for twenty-eight men and women. The owner's agent was so impressed with his beginning that he added fifteen years to the lease and built Christian a fine, large house.

Christian lived alone, sharing his joys and profits with his servants, keeping his cares and discouragements to himself. At last, the time of struggle was over ; now he need no longer work at night ; his evenings were his own again. Once more he turned to the familiar books of schooldays ; he seemed now to understand them for the first time. He read much in the Bible ; the world appeared to him well governed and justly administered under the laws of God as set forth in Holy Writ. He felt happy in his chosen life, in the work allotted him. And now he began to feel the universal human yearning for a wife and children to round out his life. To meet the young women of the neighbourhood stirred him deeply ; he thrilled to see them so tall, so vital ; their cheeks red and aglow as the morning sky, their hair like the wheat-land in August, their mouths small, grave, tight-lipped as his own. Their eyes were as blue as the clear noon sky ; like him, they kept their glance lowered when he talked to them, gently, quietly. But something kept him from falling in love with his own kind. He lived alone and lonely ; he lavished all his affections on his pets. He found satisfaction in stroking the rough, pungent coat of his dog

and the smooth dark fur of his cat ; these silent companions cheated his loneliness. But when day was done, when, the last thing at night, he turned out the light, darkness falling suddenly about him always brought back the strange fear of old.

One day in early winter, he drove into the little town to seal a transaction with a cattle dealer ; on his way back, he stopped to buy oil for the lamps and various domestic supplies. During the afternoon, it had snowed for the first time that year ; in the failing light the landscape shone dimly, white and mournful.

In the shop, the lamp glimmered, casting a circle of light upon the white wooden counter, cheerfully laden with boxes and jars. The rest of the room, with its shelves of tins, its tubs and sacks, remained in darkness. The shop was empty, but, at Christian's call, a side door opened noiselessly. A girl appeared in the light. Christian stepped forward ; suddenly he glimpsed a white face and red lips parted in a smile ; so close he was, that he could feel the girl's light breath on his cheek. He looked down at her ; their glances met. Then her lids drooped, the spell was broken. Christian's heart ceased beating ; his blood ebbed away, like time, ebbing into eternity. Then he awoke, stepped back, looked at her. He had never before seen her there ; she was a stranger. Her figure was small, slight, yet delicately rounded ; her black, shining hair fell low over a white brow. There was no drop of colour in her cheeks. He noticed that her small, dimpled hands trembled a little, that she did not look at him again ; yet her red lips were still parted in a half-smile. He gave her the list his housekeeper had made out ; she set about waiting upon him. She moved with a supple, curiously delicate animation ; it was as though she danced, as though she were following the rhythm of some intimate, secret gaiety. Her pallid face, her luminous smile came and went in the lamplight, still shimmered dimly as she passed into the darkness. They spoke no word, but when she had finished, they helped one another with an odd familiarity, loading packages and parcels into the trap.

Christian suddenly realised he had driven away without paying ; the girl did not remind him.

On the way homeward, his old childish fear beset him ; he found himself shuddering, though his heart was at peace. For he had made up his mind. Yes, that girl's eyes had cast the old ominous darkness over him ; he was afraid ; but above his fear rose a frantic will to joy, a longing that would not be denied. Fear—joy—he would yield to both.

The next day he returned to town and learned from the grocer that the girl was an orphan, from another district, and that the pastor had brought her to him. Christian spoke no word ; he did not see her again. But he went straight to the pastor and asked for her hand. The pastor did his duty ; he warned Christian against the hazards of so rash a marriage. The girl, he said, had been left a little money by her father, yes, but who her father was nobody knew, not even herself. The girl's mother, a " daughter fallen by the wayside," a woman of the district, had brought the child to the pastor. But Christian insisted that he would marry her if she were willing. The girl was summoned and, without a moment's hesitation, consented. On the following Sunday, they met again to plight their troth in the drawing-room of the parsonage. Christian held a thin golden ring in his bare hand ; silently, he drew it over the finger of the girl, the girl of his strange choice. Next, from his breast pocket, he took an ivory cross hung on a golden chain ; she smiled, bowing her head as he fastened it gently about her neck.

She whispered her name : " Martha."

He answered : " Christian."

They clasped hands. The bells pealed ; they made for church.

After the service, he drove her home to Treuen, showed her the house, the farm. She asked questions about everything like a child ; his answers she greeted with a child's attentive frown. The servants had edged up to look at them ; she met them with a chilling disdain. But from the very first, she was wholly submissive to Christian. He would not suffer

her to return to town ; instead, he took her to stay at his sister's until the wedding.

Klara's home was five miles away and they set out from Treuen in the winter dusk, the wind against their faces. The sun pierced the clouds, once more filled the heavens ; it was sinking, there, where the edge of the fields lay like the distant reaches of a sea. A thin band of gold divided the sky from the wide level of the earth. Along the broad road they flew, the wind whipping their faces. The snow glittered beneath them. The girl shivered, nestled against him ; he noticed she was wearing a dark shawl of soft foreign silk, edged with downy, crumpled feathers which brushed his cheek ; at its touch a thrill coursed through him. He pressed his arm against that softness of hers ; his blood throbbed at the contact. As he saw himself at the threshold of a new life, in wonder at the storm raging in his heart, he felt tears rising to his eyes. Nothing on earth could have made him look up at the woman beside him, wish as he would that she might read the message of their love. Gently he moved away from her.

They stopped at the steps of Klara's house ; Christian jumped down. Instinctively, he thrust out his arms as though to ward off an antagonist ; then, as she leaned towards him, he lifted her out of the carriage, held her poised in the air at arm's length. She threw back her head in a gay peal of laughter ; under her fluttering scarf, he glimpsed her little white throat, throbbing. With a superb sense of his strength, he set her safely on the ground.

Klara advanced towards them. She was Christian in a woman's form ; her brother was a living part of her life. Ever since she was thirteen, she had taken the place of the mother he had never known ; her love for him had all the passionate intensity of motherhood. Tirelessly, she had looked after him, carried him in her child's arms until they ached, watched over his sleep by night, cared for him by day ; she had forgotten the games and pleasures which, like other children, she would have enjoyed. Thus her sole reward for her deep sense of responsibility lay in the

instinctive tenderness of the child, Christian ; in him she concentrated all her life. Klara grew to beauty ; hers was a tall, strong build ; her hair, parted in the middle, was as golden, as luminous as ripe wheat at harvest time ; her glance was sheer, innocent, proud. She chose her husband with a conscious will to bear him children on whom to lavish her love, from whom to receive love in return. As a woman, she longed fully to receive that bliss which her own care of Christian had brought her when herself was but a child. She married the Baron von Gehmel, an only son who had inherited large estates from his family, young like herself and tall, handsome, innocent, grave. She accepted his love quite naturally ; the future beckoned them, serene. But the marriage remained childless.

Now, standing before her brother, she was a woman neither young nor old, a woman with stern sad eyes. Thin lines of despair edged her mouth ; barrenness froze her. She looked at her brother and his bride, saw their happiness. Her glance melted.

" She was an orphan," Christian said quite simply.

" What does it matter ? She will have children of her own ! " Klara answered.

She recalled what he had meant to her in those earlier days ; suddenly she threw her arms about him. Then, swayed by her sudden new emotions, she took the bride's hand and led her into the house.

She kept Martha with her, helped her with the various details that precede a wedding, advised her about such scant purchases as the girl could afford. Out of her own rich experience, Klara taught her every detail of house and household, discussed with her the most delicate problems of the future. Always she felt the need to serve her brother, to bring to Martha any detail that might bring happiness to Christian, to pour her knowledge, her wisdom, her experience into Martha as into a living vessel.

But Martha knew nothing, felt nothing ; she dwelled in the clouds.

Martha and Christian met only on Sundays and never

alone. In March, when all was ready at last, and the new house in Treuen was furnished, they were married. Few were invited to the wedding, since Martha knew no one and the master of Treuen invited only the people of the farm to the reception. Klara and the pastor alone accompanied the bride into the house. But Martha was not troubled by such simplicity. She smiled, radiant with pride ; as she walked, her feet seemed to skim the ground.

Sunday was the day set for the wedding. The thaw set in. Hard and clear the sun shone. The spring wind swept the sky, lashing the clouds into vaporous thin wisps that skimmed the blue spaces. Green shoots thrust their way through the deep fissures of the rich black ground under the pall of the shining thaw. Night fell early ; the wedding-feast was soon over.

Klara drove away soon ; Christian and Martha were alone. The bride, all April in her gait, went upstairs, entered the bedroom. Everywhere candles were burning. It was a spacious room, square and very beautiful, with light walls, with delicate snowy curtains that fell in narrow folds across the windows. The new furniture was redolent of wood and glue. By the windows, away from the wall, loomed two tall beds, newly made. They had been pushed together to look like one. Of light wood they were, and dazzling white the linen spread over them. A great wardrobe, made of the same wood, stood on either side of the door ; at the foot of the bed, a chest. Beds, wardrobes and chest were painted with little rose-coloured flowers.

The young wife looked around the room once, twice ; then she bent down, opened the chest. It was empty. With a laugh, she raised her hand to her dark, shining hair ; doffed her wreath and veil deftly ; laid them in the chest. Next, she unbuttoned her black silk dress, took it off, calmly, naturally ; folded it carefully ; laid it in the chest and shut down the lid. Then she put on the plain grey dress she had worn as a shop-girl, tied on a fresh apron, put out the candles, and went downstairs to the kitchen.

This was an enormous room ; it took up three-fifths of the

house. By day, the light poured into it through windows on either side ; at the end of the room, a great handsome stove, the wall behind it adorned with high shelves, agleam with a battery of new pots and pans. There was a very long table, scrubbed immaculately white. All about were benches and heavy wooden chairs ; here the household and servants took their meals together every day. A narrow door in the wall at the other end of the room opened out on to a small passage to the pantry. Smoked meats, wrapped in white linen bags, hung from its ceiling, eggs and fruit lay buried in straw on the floor. A trap-door in the middle led down into the milk-cellar where fresh milk, curds and whey, skimmed milk, and sweet and sour cream stood in great pans in a row beside earthenware bowls filled with butter. At one glance, the bride appreciated the perfect arrangement of the kitchen ; she accepted it as one might a gift. She asked the housekeeper for the keys and the account-books ; with her help, she measured out the rations for the morrow, the fodder for the animals, and the supplies needed for breakfast. She gave an eye to the work of the two young girls who were washing dishes ; she counted the cutlery and vessels, noted where they were put away. Nothing seemed strange or new to her.

Martha sat down on the sofa, her dimpled hands folded in her lap. She heard the March wind whistling by the house, dashing the heavy spring rain against the window-panes ; between the gusts, far off, she could hear footsteps. One by one the men and women left the kitchen, clattered across the yard to their own quarters. The clock ticked on. At last, over the wash of the rain, over the wind, over her own beating heart, she heard the sound of her husband's footsteps ; he was coming slowly towards the house. Now he was coming into the kitchen. She smiled, waited.

At length he entered. There he stood, in the doorway, gazing at her. Now her face shone. Here was that very darkness he had feared as a boy. But she was smiling, smiling. For the first time he spoke her name.

" Martha ! "

" Christian ! "

" Martha ! Welcome to your home."

" We shall be very happy," she said, rising.

He moved towards her, took her hand in his ; she pressed it hard against her young soft breast, smiled up into his face. With one hand, she drew the lamp towards her and turned down the light ; in the darkness they passed out of the drawing-room, hand in hand, upstairs. Now they were in the bedroom. In the darkness they undressed ; in the starless night . . .

Christian stood by the window. His heart beat fast ; that obscurity, dreaded of old, leaped up within him. He had forgotten his happiness. Fear, fear ! He dared not move towards this woman, his wife, this woman he loved and hesitated to possess.

Martha, it was, came to him, luminous through the gloom. There she stood before him, her warm fragrant breath upon his face, her glittering eyes raised to his, soft laughter rippling from her parted lips. She wound her arms about him, drew him with her to the bed. But as he felt her first soft kiss upon his mouth, as he tasted the unknown seduction of her caresses, he seized her by the shoulders and held her at arm's length from him for a long time, seeking the darkness of her eyes in the dark night ; then, finally, he took her gently, straining her towards him into his arms.

It was a good marriage ; succeeding years found them utterly happy and at peace. Christian was a good master, skilful, indefatigable, industrious and wise. He exhibited great foresight, proved highly considerate of his people. If he could command, he also knew how to recognise merit ; he was honourable in his dealings with the men and he paid good wages. Martha was no less industrious than he and obeyed him implicitly : his word was law. By day, he was lord and master : Martha never ventured to be familiar or affectionate, though she was always happy. But at night, under shelter of darkness, her happiness rose from her heart, enveloped him, surged over him in waves of tenderness. As

she might take a little boy to her, she wrapped him in a passionate embrace.

That winter she bore her first son. The child was delicate ; the mother, weakened, could not herself nurse him. So, for the child's sake, Emma was brought to Treuen.

Emma was a maid on Christian's sister's estate, nineteen years old, tall, strong and comely. Her light hair, wound in heavy plaits about her head, crowned a face of rare sweetness. Blue, her eyes were, very bright, innocent and tender ; there was a wistfulness in them, too, as though a sorrow lurked in their depths. Chastity and motherhood had been hers ; so, for all her matronly fullness, in spite of large hips and bosom, her figure was that of a girl. For love had never touched her heart, nor even desire, when the bestial lust of a man had made her a mother. Now, after many weeks, she could smile on the child at her breast and rejoice in him ; yet there had been a long time when, sleepless through the night, barely able to work by day, she had had to force herself to conjure up the figure of her child in order to blot out the terrible vision of her fear and shame. She could not forget that day, that horrible day when, bending down in the barn to pick up a bundle of hay, suddenly she was caught in a grip of iron, thrown to the ground, a rough hand over her mouth to stifle her shrieks of fright. And that face, those eyes blazing, the distortion of features in lust. That man she did not know : and the horror of his nakedness. After, lost in horror and despair, for a long time she had lain where he left her.

Her mistress soon noticed something was amiss ; she called her favourite servant to her, heard the sorry tale. The man, a day-labourer, declared himself willing to marry the girl ; but Emma refused indignantly, frantically, imploring Klara to let her stay. Now the man, touched and moved to admiration, began to court her, but Emma could not suffer the sight of him. Very soon, her condition was noticeable. Klara at once insisted upon the marriage. A ceremony was performed, but again the girl implored Klara to permit her to stay and pass her period of confinement at

her mistress's house. Never would she go near her husband. Klara proved sympathetic, helped Emma to sew clothes for the infant and stood by her bedside at its birth. A son, it was ; and his coming seemed to restore to Emma the happiness and purity of old.

A few days later, the man vanished without a word. Quite indifferent to his fate, Emma began her life anew, quiet, happy, devoted. Gradually the torturing remembrance faded into the background of her mind, especially after she came to live at Treuen.

Nursing the two children, her own golden-haired infant and the dark son of her master, she expended the same tenderness on both.

The following year, another boy was born to the master, dark-haired and like his mother. Now Emma took all three, lavishing kindness and care upon them, making their first years happy and finding happiness herself in a redemption of her youth. A nursery was set apart for the three children and Emma was with them day and night. In summer she went out gaily, swinging one on each arm, with the third held in her skirt. Out over the fields they would go to the edge of the forest where they played and laughed the day long together. And, though in her own son Emma had found something that reconciled her to life once more, her love for him was no greater than her love for the others. Indeed, her mistress's little boys were frailer than her own and she felt as though they needed greater care than he. The little brothers were called Karl and Gustav. They grew up tall and sturdy like their father, and promised to become quick, honourable, and industrious.

Emma's son was called Fritz. From his babyhood, he was an unusually strong and beautiful child. He wore his mother's gentle look ; he had her deep blue eyes, her shining hair, her strong and beautiful body. He slept much, never cried, never gave his mother the least trouble. Stronger, he grew, and healthier. He was the first of the three to walk. But in his manner and his playing he was very different from them. He was slow to learn to talk ; he

was amazingly quiet, gentle. He grew up in every way the equal of the master's children, their real brother. Yet his demeanour towards his master and mistress, towards his brothers, even, grew more and more striking as his character developed. He seemed to live only to work, to serve. At the age of four, he had no desire but to work. He would slip away from his play with the others to lurk in a corner of the kitchen or by the wall of the house. When one of the maids appeared, he would run after her, his little hands raised to help her to fill her apron with wood, or draw water, or gather vegetables in the garden. When no one was about he would move stealthily, tiptoe, through the stables, to heap hay by the handful in the horses' cribs ; or he would try his infant strength to the utmost, hauling pails and huge pitchforks that he could barely lift. Presently the kitchen-women would allot little tasks to him which he despatched with skill and speed. Always he kept that old eagerness that brought him back to them panting, his cheeks aglow, his eyes sparkling, the excitement of work accomplished filling him with joy. But when he received his meed of praise, a word of thanks or a trifling reward, he would go off by himself, clutching a stick, a stone or a handful of earth in his tremulous hot fist, and singing to himself. His voice was true, warm and soft ; those who heard him invariably fell under his spell. Yet he refused to sing with others. Let others sing in chorus or invite him to play with them and he relapsed into silence. Even stranger, and in distinct contrast to his voice, was his laugh. He laughed quite suddenly, yet his laughter racked his whole body ; his child's lips parted, without any sound passing save the hiss of his breath.

He never expressed a wish ; he never deserved punishment ; he never had cause to cry.

Twice a week, the children went to school, driving if the weather was bad. At school, Fritz worked diligently, displayed a remarkable memory. His teacher cited him to others as a model. He also came in for high praise at home and about the farm ; yet always he remained modest and self-effacing. The master's sons, his foster-brothers, adored

him ; but again, he stood aloof, avoided them when they played, took no part in their conversation. He must always raise between himself and them the barrier of his future—a future of servitude which even now sheltered his loneliness. At night, in the nursery which the three children shared, he was always reluctant to undress with them. First he gathered the brothers' clothes and shoes, took them out into the hall to brush and polish them. By the time he returned, they were fast alseep. Then he undressed in great haste and crept into bed.

In the morning he was always up first. Like the servants, he did not need to be awakened, and, like them, he always washed at the well. When the brothers woke, they would find him fully dressed. Then, ashamed, they would reach for their clothes. In his earliest childhood, he showed a peculiar modesty ; his only act of disobedience was when, at the age of four, he refused to be bathed with the other boys.

When Fritz was eight, an incident occurred which revealed a strange, even shocking, fund of violence underlying his gentleness. It was on a spring afternoon ; the boy was in the kitchen with his mother, when suddenly a giant of a man stamped into the room, and seized Emma by the hand. Pale, panic-stricken, horror in her eyes, she gazed wildly about, as though seeking some way of escape. Fritz looked up, saw the aggressor's face, an immense, round, utterly colourless face with little, beady eyes almost buried in it and a wild red beard bristling about an ashen mouth that gaped like the jaws of a beast.

The mother raised her hand. It quivered like a leaf. She pointed at Fritz, whispered : " There ! "

The man glanced sharply at the child, stretched out his massive hand and :

" Come here, you ! " he roared.

Fritz did not move.

" Come, Fritz," his mother said. " He is your father."

The man dropped her hand, strode towards the child :

" Shake hands," he commanded.

Slowly the child took the hand the other proffered. A broad, hard hand, overgrown with red hairs. He gazed at it solemnly, his face flushed, his lips parted. Suddenly his head shot down, he buried his teeth deep in the other's leathery flesh. The man roared, sought to snatch his hand away ; but the child leaped with the swing of the arm and did not let go.

" You whelp," the father shouted, flinging the child against the wall so violently that he fell back with a crunch, insensible. Emma rushed to him and took him in her lap.

The man moved off.

" So that's the sort of whelp I've spawned ! " he muttered, nursing his injured hand.

Cursing mother and child, he wandered back to town. And, in years to come, often he would gaze at the little white beaded scar on his hand ; often he would say :

" There's a whelp I spawned . . . Christ, what a whelp ! "

And if he wept once, if a tear trickled over his broad cheeks and dripped over his hand, he never bothered again about his child, though he did remember him and counted his years.

During the illness that succeeded his shock, a terrible change came over Fritz. His pale, ingenuous face turned red, malignant ; his features seemed to widen and grow coarse ; there was an indefinable malevolence in him. Emma was afraid of her own child. She fled from his bedside, came back to him solely to hide him from others. She prayed for him.

The second night, again, she watched by his side. Gradually, she fell asleep, her hands pressed against her eyes to shut out the sight of Fritz's altered face. When she woke up, it was broad daylight. To her stupefaction, her son's features had become as before, mild, placid, gentle. Little by little, her mother's love returned ; she took Fritz into her heart again, close to her, yes, but no closer than the two other children, the fruit of another's womb.

When Fritz was eleven years old, the master, to humour his lust for work, made him stable boy and general helper

about the farm. He was to receive for this a small weekly wage. From then on, the others saw him only when he worked. In his leisure, he kept strictly to himself, he hid from his fellows, virtually disappeared.

The next few years were really happy for all those at Treuen. The crops were rich, the cattle throve, the men and women lived in amity, the children grew in health and beauty. No one had to wait for the money due to him, there was food aplenty for all, and to spare ; the holidays brought peace and joy ; the master and mistress lived together, happy as ever. Everything served to unite them. All day long they went about their tasks, and, eager as bride and groom, longed for night and love, for the moment when Martha's kisses would cling to her husband's lips and her laughter ring joyously through the darkness.

At meals she sat beside him, his maid-servant like the others, obedient as the humblest servant to his glance, his word of commendation. For all eyes at Treuen turned towards the master ; his burden was their burden, his joy their joy.

Christian was now thirty-seven years old, a tall, broad-shouldered man. His blonde hair waved over his forehead, unusually broad and high ; a blonde beard hid his massive chin ; the veins stood out blue at his temples. Most impressive of all was the quiet, kindly power which heightened the keen, imperious expression in his eyes. He spoke little, the work of the farm went forward according to plan almost without need of orders. Christian's life was one with his people's ; and they put their lives in his hands in the deepest trustfulness. He cared for them all, from his own family down to the merest day-labourer. And he had chosen his servants well.

Blank, his steward, grey-haired and wise with time, but attentive to his master's will, seconded him. In addition to this loyal servant, Christian had Andreas, the fisherman, who guarded the great Treuen pond and the small lakes in the surrounding district, who built dams and weirs and attended to the irrigation of the dry pastures ; a smith who

built ploughs and carts, who kept them in good order, who shod the horses and made locks and fences wherever necessary ; a cabinet-maker and carpenter ; a roofer ; and many farm-hands, men and women, with extra day-labourers for the busy seasons. The cottages stood round the house-grounds in a wide half-circle ; Christian had made them habitable and assigned them to the skilled labourers, with their wives and children, and to the married hands with theirs. Each had its own small vegetable and flower garden ; these alone Christian's servants needed to raise, since everything else—flour, potatoes, meat, clothing—came from him. Their labour they must give to their master, but their leisure they might enjoy untroubled ; and all they earned was paid them save for a small contingent fund against accident and old age.

Between the cottages and main-buildings there was a wide pond. Dense osier lay about it ; here the nightingale nested in the spring ; here too the ducks in summer winged over the shining waters. Here the children came to play, and the adults loved to pass the time of day.

There were fields and gardens and yards, stone-paved ; a well, too, and rich black earth, bearing vegetables and berries of all sorts, lined by hedges of wild rose. There were elders and nut-trees in profusion.

Every Sunday, two wagons drove everyone to church to the nearest town.

The master's carriage bowled along ahead of the servants'. These drives to church were not unlike little festive processions ; they were the only thing in Christian's unassuming life that aroused his neighbours' envy, sometimes their ridicule. But he paid no attention ; his pride was utterly genuine. After all, he was but a tenant at Treuen, yet he worked for the place as though it were his own.

One day, to crown his happiness and set a seal upon his joy for ever, a daughter was born to him in the fifteenth year of his marriage. She grew up a bewitching child, a radiant little creature, with her father's features but with her mother's inexhaustible vitality. They called her Anna.

Christian loved this child with a love deeper and more tender than any he had known. He was infinitely touched when he beheld her little face, so like his own, yet so like his wife's.

Martha had changed, too, since the child's birth. Anna's cot stood where the chest had been, at the foot of her parents' beds. Since Anna's birth, Martha had never again embraced her husband in the darkness, laughed seductively or stretched forth her arms in desire. Waking in the morning, she would avert her pale face, look away from the child. A new, purer tenderness permeated their love, held Christian and Martha apart with exactly the same force that formerly had drawn them together. And when they had lain, the night through, side by side, united in their hearts only, Martha would take the child up in the morning and give her to her father, as though it were herself she offered. And Christian would take the sleeping child from her arms and wait with longing for its smile when it awakened.

At Treuen, everyone doted upon the child. But Emma was jealous as she saw the mother nurse this last-born ; it was a source of anger to her that Anna slept in the big bedroom and that Martha watched over her night and day.

Fritz had also come to see the new-born daughter in her cradle. He was thirteen years old now ; his good looks had fulfilled the promise of his childhood. Smiling, he leaned over the child. A strange desire surged through him : slowly he raised his strong hand, laid it on the baby's head. He felt the tiny skull against his palm, he caught the wrist, its faint pulse ; and suddenly a terrible emotion gripped him. His blood surged through him, his own pulses hammered furiously to the faint thudding of the infant's blood, his heart throbbed in his throat. And, soundless, over his gaping mouth, laughter, a laughter voiceless under the hissing of his breath.

Then he fled, ran savagely about the courtyard, aimless, baffled. He must find action . . . work . . . something to do. . . . But gradually the turmoil within him was stilled ; he

plunged his head in the waters of the well ; a peace fell over him.

When the boys grew too old to share the room with their nurse, and the master's two sons were given a bedroom to themselves, Fritz asked leave to move into the servants' house in a room of his own. Would he not soon be one of the regular hands, he argued. His mother was pleased with his humility ; she persuaded the master to do as he asked, and he yielded reluctantly.

Fritz was given a small room to himself ; now he could live in complete solitude. At dusk he would creep among the reeds by the pond. He liked to hear the frogs. Hour-long he would listen to the plop and splash they made ; gradually he could see them. He liked to feel them, too. Their prominent eyes, darting forward and back, looked like pulses. Once he bent down and caught one in his joined hands. How soft, how cool it was against his hands ! The pulse of the frog, the life beating within it, roused him. Again, a strange excitement surged through him ; again his eyes glittered, again the young face changed to a sinister mask and the smiling lips were parted in silent laughter. From that day, Fritz avoided the pond and its neighbourhood.

A year later, in summer, he was wandering through the woods and came upon a robin, fallen from its nest. Its tiny black eyes looked up at him, its little beak opened and shut in silent woe. He picked it up, held it in his hands. His hand closed over the bird, he gasped ; then he ran away as though driven forward by a whip which was his heart ; the sweat poured down his face, his mouth gaped. . . . But the bird was still alive when he reached home.

He hastened with it to his room and let it flutter from his hands into a cap ; next he held up his hands, palm outwards, in the air, his fingers wide apart ; he stood there waiting for his excitement to ebb with the cooling of his blood. Then he began to feed the little creature. After a long time, at great pains, he cured it of its hurt, tamed it. It would fly to him when he whistled, it sat on his shoulder, it ate out of his hand.

By the following spring, the bird was so tame that it would fly to him out of his window into the garden, when he left the cage open. There, one day, little Anna saw it. Delighted by the pretty creature, she stretched out her arms for it. Fritz at once went to the cage, enticed the bird into it, and gave it to the child, refusing the money Martha wished to give him for it.

Anna was entranced. She sat beside it all day long, prattling to it and laughing. She would not go to sleep at night until the cage was set on a chair at her bedside. Fritz, who still brushed the children's clothes and shoes, passed by the open door on his way back, saw the child asleep and, beside her, the little bird on its perch, sleeping He stepped softly to the bed, looked at her in the dim light. He raised his left hand, touched her head ; his palm grew warm against her downy curls, her little pulse was beating. The bird moved ; the flutter of its wing startled him. He wrenched his hand away from the child's head ; trembling, he opened the door of the cage, seized the bird. But before their twin hearts could breathe together, as they had done that day in the woods, his strong fingers closed about it. He gazed fiercely at the sleeping child, his eyes glittering. Now he heard the soft crunch of the robin's bones ; something warm and moist poured into his hand ; against his palm, the bird's blood was smooth and rich as velvet. Within him, all was quiet. His heart beat regularly, his face was serene and peaceful as an angel's.

To hide the bird, he dropped it into Anna's shoe and made for the garden. With his hands, he dug it a little grave under an elder ; without touching the bird again, without bending over it or moving, he dropped it into the hole, which he immediately filled up again, stamping hard on the earth that covered it. The moist, strong smell of the earth, the sweet, still coolness of mould on his hands, the smooth surface of the grave that held everything covered and hidden pleased him. He went back to his work singing.

Everyone thought that the child must have left the cage

open and that the bird had flown away. Anna shed bitter tears over her loss ; daily, she questioned Fritz about her pet. But the boy shook his head, kept silent. He sawed a branch off a wild-cherry tree ; out of it, with infinite pains, he carved the child a doll, a pretty toy, with shapely limbs and attractive features. He was very skilful at all such things ; and always he gave his mother precise instructions as to how the doll's clothes were to be made. The child grew to love the doll as fondly as she had the bird ; she would not let it out of her little arms day or night.

For additional consolation, their father gave the children two ponies. Every day Fritz could be seen running patiently beside one of the little beasts, holding Anna on its back as expertly and carefully as a woman.

In the autumn, he liked to work in the garden, digging up the dark earth, turning it over. He liked to gather the dead leaves, pile them up with the earth for leaf-mould ; all winter long, as he worked, he enjoyed seeing the leaves gradually disintegrate and change substance, until by spring, all he would see was fine earth, no different from any other. For him, too, the next years moved to a rhythm of happiness.

Summer came and with it Anna's fourth birthday. In spring, she had lain ill of a fever ; it had left a large, festering sore on her chest, a little above her heart. Under Martha's careful treatment it soon healed, though it left a white circular scar behind.

In her joy at the child's recovery, the mother suddenly wanted a picture of her ; she therefore decided to take her into town secretly and have her photographed as a surprise for Christian. But Anna, usually so obedient, stubbornly refused to face the camera. She burst into tears, a wild bitter frenzy quite unlike her childish weeping ; soon her distress rose to screams of terror. Her mother, seeking to calm her, explained how, out of the black box of the camera, an exact likeness of herself would emerge, with the same eyes, hands, feet, clad in the same pretty

dress. In despair, the child hid her face in her hands and sought refuge in the remotest corner of the room. Finally Martha told her that the picture was to be a present for her father ; then, at last, Anna explained her fear, told how she thought the black box was to take her and make her into a picture. She did not wish to be a picture, she wished to stay at home, to play with her mother and father and doll, with the ponies and all the animals she loved. She begged her mother not to deliver her up to the black box. It was a long time before Martha could reassure her ; then her gaiety came back slowly.

At last she laughed ; when they posed her, she assumed a delicate, graceful attitude. Her little bare feet seemed barely to graze the ground ; she held her head against her left hand, raising her right shoulder-high, her index-finger pointing upward in warning. A faint smile hovered about her lips ; but her wide eyes still bore the shadow of her fear, they were still dim with tears.

Her birthday fell a month later. It was midsummer ; the heavy work of the fields had not yet begun. The grain, rich and green, stood high as a child ; swelling fruit hung from every bough, berries in shining clusters from every bush. But the hay had been mown ; it lay drying in the sun, fragrant, dead. No bird, now, sang through the night. The sheep and lambs skipped awkwardly over the meadows; the cows, heavy, lumbering, led their calves, milk-fragrant and mild, to nibble the grass with their soft lips ; two mares cantered neck and neck in the wake of their capering foals. All Treuen lay in a ripening peace : the days were bright, the nights blue and transparent, stars strewed the sky, the breeze blew softly. People were as animate, as happy as Nature ; the farm echoed with laughter and song.

It was Sunday. The master's sister had driven over after church, laden with gifts : a large bag of sweets and a pair of fine white stockings with red stripes and two five mark pieces in the toe of each. Anna was delirious with joy and excitement. Her little fluttering hands held her pleated skirt outspread as she showed each gift in turn. Like a tiny

dancer, she poised on one foot, her arms outspread to balance her, showing off the white soles of her new shoes. She jumped, romped, laughed all day long ; and, when bedtime came, she was not ready.

Late that afternoon, Christian left Treuen to drive his sister home. Since Anna's birth, Klara no longer withdrew into her bitter loneliness on holidays at Treuen ; she no longer feared to cast gloom over the happiness of others. Now she came often to Christian's, sunning her heart in little Anna's radiance. Her love for Christian deepened ; she considered him now with admiration and awe. At the stately entry to Klara's house, brother and sister parted ; Christian was eager to return home. Klara stood looking after him as he drove away across the vast level of the plain under the lofty arch of the sky ; the stars seemed to crowd in glory about his head.

Christian drove home slowly. He was thinking of that winter drive, long ago, with Martha, his fiancée. It had been cold then : the snow-covered land shone about them and the sky was dark with clouds ; but her eyes had held him in a darkness deeper still. Now it was warm, the heat of the sun had long since waned ; the sky was clear as glass and ablaze with stars. But the earth was dim, silent, big with life. He thought of his wife, remembering the brooding night of her eyes ; he saw her now, bent not over him, appealing, but over their small daughter. A sudden longing to see Anna gripped him ; he urged his horses swiftly forward.

But he came home to find everything still, deserted but immaculate as ever. The great yard gleamed in the night, the well murmured softly ; Christian could hear the animals stirring in the closed stalls. Only the doors of one great barn stood fastened back upon their hinges, framing the darkness within. The stars in their splendour swung low over its roof. Christian unhitched the horses and stood for a moment, held by the yawning blackness of the open barn. Martha had waited for him on the bench in front of the house ; now she came towards him. He started at

her presence. Then he caught her hand, drew her down beside him on the bench ; they sat there speechless ; earth lay silent about them ; the stars sang.

At last Christian, his eyes still fixed on the open doorway of the barn, asked :

" Has Güse been told to come to-morrow ? "

(Güse, the roofer, was to mend the thatch of the barn for the storing of the harvest sheaves.)

The music of the stars receded from Christian's ears, and the barn's vast darkness from his eyes. He came back to earth ; now he heard his wife answering :

" Yes, Güse will be here at noon to-morrow."

" Have Fritz go down to the pond early. He can cut the reeds and soak them."

" Yes."

" I'll be in the forest with the boys. We've some trees to fell."

" Very well, Christian."

" We'll get through all right, I think," he finished.

Martha groped for his strong hand and held it fast ; they sat there together a few moments. Then Christian rose and she followed him into the house. They went upstairs to their room ; heard, through the darkness, Anna's delicate breathing. They made no light. Martha stood beside the child's cot, the starry brightness etching the soft outline of her shoulders and arms in the dim room. She hesitated for a moment, then turned suddenly and went towards Christian. Her rippling laughter flowed over him softly as the waters of a stream. Passionately, she embraced him. The darkness of her eyes drowned him like the night. She drew him to her.

The child woke up, called. Martha released him. Christian lit the candle, saw her standing at the foot of the cot, her head bowed, her face hidden in her loose dark hair.

Already the child was standing up, rosy with sleep, in unnatural high excitement, laughing and chattering. Again and again she asked for her pretty new frock.

" No, you must go to sleep now," Christian murmured

gently, seeking to make her lie down. But she began to cry. So the mother, silent, humble, gave Anna the dress, which Anna took in her arms and caressed. Then Anna demanded her new shoes. These, too, Martha gave her. Anna laughed and prattled with delight. Her father picked her up and set her in the bed between them. She began to play with him roguishly, seizing his big hand in both of hers and pressing her little face against it. Suddenly she discovered his broad gold ring and tried to pull it off, but Christian, charmed with her childish play, fought back, caught her little hand in his clenched fist. Whenever he did this, Anna's laughter rippled through the room. With downcast eyes, the mother watched their play until at last the child grew tired and fell asleep. Christian put out the light ; but he felt the darkness only for a moment. Soon, in the clear starlight, he could make out his wife's face, her delicate lids closed over her dark eyes, and, close against his heart, his child's head, golden by day but now gleaming silver. Full of a sense of peace and fulfilment, he fell asleep.

That night, however, he woke out of sleep to hear a shriek of anguish on his child's lips. It was no childish fright, but the deep anguished sob of a creature in despair. It struck terror into his heart. For the rest of the night, he watched over her sleep ; in the early morning, reluctantly he tore himself from her side.

But Anna awoke as gay as ever, with no trace of the excitement of the night, save that she refused to wear any dress but her new one and insisted on the new shoes as well. Her mother let her have her way and kept the child by her all morning.

The twenty-fourth of June dawned in splendour, the sky in the east was ariot with flame. The dew had scarcely fallen before the sunlight dried the earth up once more. Under a cloudless dome, the wide plain seemed to flaunt its fruitfulness and plenty. Larks on their quivering wings soared singing to heaven.

Work began early at Treuen, the master allotting his task to each. He called Fritz last of all.

" I want you to help Güse to-day, Fritz," he said, " the roof on Barn 4 needs mending. Go down to the pond now and start cutting the reeds. Fairly thick ones will do ; Güse will need two layers. Soak them well ; have them ready for him by noon. You can take Friederike and Minna to help you."

" Must I go to the pond ? " Fritz asked, startled and afraid. But at once he said meekly : " All right, Master ! " and went off with lowered head.

The master took the two boys to the woods to show them which trees were to be cut down. Blank, the steward, took a group of mowers to Section 7. In the yard, great tubs of swill for the pigs were being boiled and mashed ; the wagons were washed there and the horses watered. It was milking time ; the milkmaids carried their heavy pails into the house under the eye of Emma, who oversaw and reckoned everything. The shepherds drove their flocks out into the pastures at the edge of the forest ; the cows and horses soon followed them, leaving the yard deserted. The mistress with two maids was in the garden gathering red clusters of berries. Little Anna played near them.

Fritz was down by the pond which he had avoided for so long. He had gone there hesitantly, pushing cautiously through the osier thickets to the bank. But the water was not as it had been when he last saw it ; there was no dark luminousness and undulation ; now the pond was invisible, not like water but like a mirror of the sun's brightness, still and strange, a dazzling surface of burnished metal. There were no bull-frogs plopping and splashing ; nowhere could he see their pulsing, soft bodies. This calmed his agitation and he went determinedly to work, cutting the osiers with his sharp knife, carefully choosing those of the size the master wanted. Soon the little duck-girls passed by, driving their waddling charges before them. Amid a loud quacking, the birds plunged straight into the water ; it was as if its glistening immobility did not move before their plying feet. The sparkling drops of water that sprayed from their feathers as they swam and dived seemed to have come

by enchantment from other depths than that brazen pond's.

The sun rose in the sky. Fritz cut the reeds, which the girls tied up in little bundles and anchored in the water with stones.

Friederike and Minna were fourteen. Their short skirts revealed their strong, sunburned legs ; their blonde plaits, fastened at the ends with red wool, fell below their white linen kerchiefs and swung at every movement of their active young bodies. They looked exactly alike, with their healthy brown freckled faces and, when they laughed, their splendid white teeth flashed. They teased the boy, tickling his ears with willow-tips, but, when he turned around, they ran off uttering little frightened squeals. When they saw that he made no attempt to follow them, they mocked him from a distance, sticking out their tongues and making faces at him. He did not move but looked at them, saw the flying skirts short against their bare brown legs, their open mouths tempting him to the fray. But he stayed where he was and went on with his work.

Gradually, in the rising heat, a strange delirious excitement possessed him. He felt the blood stream softly, caressingly from his heart and through his limbs, rise to his head and temples, ever pulsing gently, fill even the fine veins of his eyelids. A lightness filled his body, his feet seemed to leave the ground, it was as though he were treading on air. He began to sing, his clear voice echoing high and mellow, a weird beauty shining on his face.

Suddenly his hand shook, helplessly ; he cut himself deep in the ball of the thumb. He felt no pain, saw only the flow of blood. He looked at it for a long time as it ebbed out in shining, sunlit beads ; with it the last burden of his body flowed away too, his last forces left him, the beat of his pulses abated. Like a vessel poured clear of its contents, he floated in dream, joyously across the summer day.

But the moment passed. The day moved on in its course, the two young duck-girls came by. When they saw his bleeding hand, they fetched water from the pond in their

cupped hands to wash the wound and plants to stanch the blood, laying them on and binding them securely under a broad water-lily leaf. Fritz realised suddenly that it was already noon and all his stable-work was still to be done. He ran back to the yard with the same sense of lightness that gave him the impression of skimming the ground, never touching it with his feet. At dinner he ate more than usual and in great haste, yet the heavy meal seemed not to satisfy his hunger. As soon as he was finished, his mother gave him a great basket of food to take to the woodmen in the forest. He would have to hurry to return in time for Güse, who must begin work on the barn-roof at three o'clock. His knees were still trembling, his feet strangely light as he walked through the wood, though its cool dimness seemed to recall his scattered senses. But on the way home, he suddenly stumbled and fell, striking his head violently against the root of a tree. He rose slowly, dazed. The fearful hissing laugh rose in his breast, his mouth gaped, his head fell backward. Mustering all his strength, he craned it forward and made for home at great speed. It was half-past three when he arrived. He went into the kitchen to slake the fierce thirst that tortured him ; but the cows had not yet been milked and there was no milk left.

His mother was standing by the stove, watching the boiling berries she had gathered that morning. He saw her slicing slabs of sugar with a chopping knife from a huge loaf and dropping them into the steaming saucepan. At first the hills of sugar stood up white in the slow vortex of the berries' boiling blood, then slowly grew red, sank, and nothing remained but the crimson gurgling surface, swirling sluggishly. The heat of the stove, the sight of the boiling syrup, excited him again. Laughter rose again in his throat, he turned, ran out of the kitchen. His mouth was parched and dry ; it ached ; but he ran on past the well back to his osier-cutting at the pond, seeking in work and order a refuge from himself.

Martha was sitting in front of the house with Anna playing at her feet. The child looked after Fritz as he ran to

the pond ; suddenly her face grew pensive. Then she turned to her mother and said,

" I didn't feed the ducks to-day, mummy."

Since the new broods were hatched this had been her daily task.

" You can't go to the pond to-day, darling," Martha said. " You must stay here with me."

" But they're hungry," the child urged. " They haven't had any bread to eat. I must go and feed them."

" But the little ducks have a mummy too, and she gave them their dinner long ago. You can't go to the pond to-day, baby."

" Oh mummy, but she can't have. The mother duck can't cut their bread herself," Anna insisted. " I must go quickly and take it to them, or they'll be ever so hungry."

Then she began to plead, using all her charm and beauty in cajoling Martha, until finally the mother went into the kitchen to fetch the bread for her. Here once more she sought to persuade the child against going to the pond, but it was all in vain. Anna proved irresistible, clinging so hard to her mother's legs that Martha would have had to use force to pry her hands loose. She stood locked in Anna's embrace, unable to move, while Anna looked up out of the wide folds of her skirts laughing mischievously. Over and over again the child repeated that the ducklings would go hungry unless she fed them. Won by the child's excitement, infected by her gaiety, Martha laughed a long and rippling peal that she never allowed herself by day. A passionate invitation rang through the deep notes, a crystal joy sang in the child's clear echo, lighter yet so strangely like. Now Anna freed her mother and it was Martha who embraced the child, taking her by her little arms, dancing with her in a ring, faster and faster, until the child's feet rose from the floor and she swung in the air to the swift turn of her mother's feet. The kitchen resounded with their glee. But, of a sudden, in the midst of their dancing, Martha caught sight of her husband accompanying the cattle-dealer towards the house. Confused, exhausted, she stopped.

Christian glanced through the window, saw the child's fair head nestling against her mother, saw Martha's dark head bent low against Anna's. He smiled, then went on ; but all through his talk with the cattle-dealer, he retained the picture of his wife and daughter ; it filled his heart with happiness.

Mother and child stood in the kitchen, still locked in an embrace, breathless after their exertion. But the little girl had not forgotten her purpose ; she continued to press her cause. Martha surrendered. She went into the pantry and cut bread, breaking it up into small pieces, while the child brought her basket and filled it with both hands. On top of the ducklings' dinner, Martha laid a piece of birthday cake for Anna herself to eat while she fed the animals ; then she kissed her again, and, eager to return to the work she had left, she pushed the little one tenderly out of the door by her shoulders.

Fritz, returning from the pond with a load of wet reeds over his shoulder, was making for Barn 4. He saw Anna come out of the house, the sunlight bright on her curls, on her shining new shoes. She came towards him, lifted up her basket to show him the errand that brought her, said : " I'm off to feed the ducks, Fritz."

His back bent under his load ; he gasped. At each step, the wet ends of the reeds whipped his legs. It did not sting him into pain, but vexed him sorely. Now he was quivering with rage. He uttered little grunts as he went straight on towards the barn, paying no attention to the child. Alone, she ran down to the pond.

Fritz dropped his bundle against the barn wall nearest the field, where the roof was to be mended. A ladder stood against the wall ; up there on the roof, somewhere, silent, unseen, old Güse was working. Squatting among the osier bundles he had set all round him, Güse was plaiting the strands together, padding them with moss, laying thick thatch carefully over the plank framework of the roof. In spite of his age and the heat of the day, he worked energetically, heedless of the outside world from which his deafness

practically cut him off. At rare intervals, however, he would poke his old head out of his hedge of reeds to look down into the yard and see whether the cows had been brought home to milk ; as he could not hear the curfew, the return of the cows set the moment for his evening rest. Fritz came up the ladder and nudged the old man ; Güse looked up, glanced appraisingly at the bundles the boy had stacked up for him, nodded, said : " Two more ! " and turned to his work again.

The open doorway of the barn lured Fritz in. He longed to hide in the deepest shadows, there to forget the piercing brightness and fury of the sun. He crossed the threshold, where the twinkling radiance of the day spent itself in a still, deathlike darkness, square between earth and sky, like midnight in the midst of noon.

The floor was lined a foot high with straw ; Fritz could not hear his own footsteps. The straw rustled under his feet ; the musty odour of dried grain rose out of the sultry, silent barn. The stillness, the heat, the smell oppressed him ; laid a weight of lead upon his limbs ; stifled the laughter tingling in his throat ; blinded his eyes ; brought him rest. He wandered about in the comforting darkness, stamping his feet in time with the hammering of his heart.

He looked about him for shelter ; he remembered his work. As he turned to leave the barn, a bird shot through the door, uttering a cry. Then it vanished into waves of darkness. There was a chirrup from a corner of the barn : the young, answering the mother's call.

" A nest ! " Fritz thought. So he went back towards the pond, back to his work. To plunge fiercely into it, to lose himself in it.

Suddenly he saw Anna, very near him, playing with Friederike and Anna was shouting, laughing ; the red heart of her mouth gleamed, beckoned. His blood beat fast, fast . . .

Now the child was close to him, her little face flushed with merriment, her eyes bright . . . moist . . . her little

lips moist, too, like flowers, dew-coated. Out of the pale neck, a vein rose, swollen . . . throbbing . . .

" Here, Fritz," she said, holding out a piece of cake.

He shook his head silently. He bent down, picked up another load of reeds.

" I know where there's a bird's nest, with young ones in it," he said softly.

" Where ? "

He made no answer, but turned. Anna followed.

" Let's give my cake to the birds ! "

" Birds ? There are no birds ! " Fritz said.

" There must be ! " Anna said. " Show me ! Show me ! "

As they came near the yard, Fritz suddenly began to run. It was afternoon, but the yard was still empty ; the cows not yet home for milking ; the mistress busy in the kitchen ; the master somewhere in the house.

" Show me the nest, Fritz ! " He moved away.

" Show me the nest, Fritz ! "

Silence, now, and a sense of decay. A sharp noise . . . rats, gnawing. . . . High overhead the rap of Güse, working on the roof.

The child started at the sound of her own voice. She whispered, now, and stood on tiptoe that Fritz might hear her better.

" Show me the nest, Fritz ! "

[illegible] he moved towards the corner where the nest l[illegible]g under the beams.

" Let me see the nest ! " she whispered again, spreading her arms so he might lift her.

He bent down, clasped her under the shoulders. As he crouched to lift her off the ground, she laughed. Soft rippling laughter like the cooing of doves. He held her up at arms' length, rose on his toes, knowing, the while, that he could never reach the nest. Anna laughed, shook, almost fell ; firmly his arms closed about her legs and he lifted her high above him. He threw his head back ; a dark flush suffused his cheeks ; a mist blurred his eyes ; he closed his

lids ; his mouth gaped. Now the spell of evil, the mystery of his other self rose in him ; the diabolic mask covered his serene, pure face.

He felt Anna's tender flesh under her clothes. Her light pulse-beat fluttered in his throbbing, hot hands ; the tempest in his heart broke loose, raged, swept him headlong, and he was lost.

He dashed the child to the ground, flung himself down, also. He could feel her little heart, racing, and the wild pounding of his own, mingled, inextricable, one. Thunder roared in his ears ; his blood was a living flame ; his frenzied breath beat against his breast, choked him. The blind powers of lust moved his hands as he tore at her clothes, at her flesh. . . . Now his hands pressed ; now they loomed large, urgent, over her throat. Pressure. . . . Pressure. . . . Anna's laughter thinned ; his fingers pressed her delicate throat.

She fell back, inanimate.

The rats gnawed on at the roof ; Güse worked—tap, tap, tap !—at the roof. High under the beams, in the nest, silence.

He awoke. Water, steely-cool, over his neck, that had been so hot, over his throat, that had been parched. He drew his left hand out from under the child to wipe the water away. It was covered with blood. Fritz recalled now that he had cut himself at the pond ; he thought it was the same cut, bleeding. He had forgotten his hand that still gripped the child's throat ; he had forgotten the child herself, deep under his body. A vast ineffable peace fell upon him ; a weariness of release which was like utter death. Slowly he raised his head, looked up. Now his face was pure, angelic.

Drowsily, he perceived a large green beetle moving clumsily over the straw towards him. Laughing, he rolled over and lay on his back, scarcely noticing Anna's body beside him, quite unaware of what it meant. He felt his clothes in disorder and was ashamed ; he adjusted them. Then he remembered his work. As he rose, he caught sight of a tumble of bright clothes and sprawling, lifeless limbs.

One thought loomed supreme in his mind ; he must set everything right. In a flash his weariness was gone.

He ran out of the barn into the dazzling sunshine. The yard was empty. Light were his limbs ; his heart thumped within him. Cool, his hands were, and at rest ; his throat was free from the oppression that had gripped it ; he sang softly to himself.

The garden-tools hung under the eaves on the side of the barn that faced the house ; Fritz took down a mattock with a long handle. As he ran back to the barn with it, he saw an old tramp, with a rough grey beard and a strip of red about his neck. The colour was so bright Fritz could see it from afar. It was red . . . red. . . . Was it blood ? Was it a scarf ?

The old man was stealing towards the garden. As he saw Fritz approaching, he grew frightened, retreated towards the well and stood there, hesitant.

Fritz swung his mattock threateningly ; the vagabond dashed away over the fields. Fritz looked after him for a moment, then : " I must set everything right ! " he said to himself, as he ran into the barn.

Hurrying past the dead child, he made for the uttermost reach of the blackness. With his mattock, he hacked away at the ground, pierced the layers of straw and stone, reached the soft earth beneath, cool, dark, dead. He kneeled down, spread his arms, measured the length of the grave. A great peace fell upon him. Then he rose to his feet, ran back towards the child, picked up the body by the clothes.

" I must set everything right," he whispered.

With his hands, Fritz scooped out the cool, heavy earth, thrust Anna's body in it, piled the earth over again and placed straw upon it. His throat was dry with dust ; his thirst returned ; he could no longer breathe in the musty heat. He left the barn without looking around.

The sunlit yard was full of life. Mooing and pawing the ground, the cows yielded their full udders to the milk-maids ; soon the bright pails would brim with foaming milk. The master came out of the house with one of the

maids. His kindly glance swept the yard ; then he moved off.

Emma stood a little way out in the yard, counting the pails of milk as the girls carried them past her to the dairy ; one of the maids rang the bell to summon the workers. Old Güse, who had been watching for the cows to come home, climbed down carefully as the first beast entered the yard. Fritz walked slowly beside him until the bell rang ; then he rushed ahead and was the first to reach the kitchen. He seized his mug and drank avidly, holding the cool sweet liquid in his mouth for a long time before he swallowed it.

Christian had made a good bargain with the cattle-buyer. On his way out, he stopped at the kitchen a moment to arrange for a little celebration, since it was St. John's day, as a reward for the excellent care they had taken of the sheep and the fine profit he had netted. They were all to eat supper out of doors ; the mistress had beer and currant wine for those who wished it. All looked forward joyfully to the feast : their hands flew over their work and those who had finished helped their fellows, in order that the fun might start as early as possible.

The afternoon passed quickly. Shortly after six, the master and his sons came back home from the woods. The boys dragged great dry branches and strips of bark behind them, for there was to be a bonfire that night. They went into the barn. Karl ran to one corner, looking for an axe with which to cut his branches ; to his astonishment, he found Fritz fast asleep. With a start, the lad awoke, sprang to his feet and gazed at the boys, wide-eyed. Karl asked Fritz to pick out a light axe for him. Fritz laughed as Karl twitted him. Suddenly, Fritz noticed that the place where the mattock had hung was empty.

Fritz ran about the barn, looking for it. He found it propped up against the open door, where he had left it. He picked it up and was about to bring it back to its proper place, when Emma appeared before him.

" What is that mattock doing there ? The barn is no place for it."

Fritz looked at her for a second, mattock in hand.

" I needed it," he answered, " I had to use it for something."

" Well, that's no reason to leave it lying around. Go and hang it up at once and don't let me see you leaving any tools about again, either."

Fritz did as he was told, then joined the boys who were preparing the bonfire in the yard. He felt light, happy ; he wanted to move among people again. For the first time in many years, he sought out the company of Karl and Gustav.

At dusk, the animals returned to the farmhouse. Within an hour, every beast must be put up for the night, every tool cleared away and the fire in the kitchen extinguished. Already the long table, scoured white, stood before the door, with benches and chairs on each side, and with mugs and bowls on it for beer and wine. Their work finished, the hands crowded round the fine stone trough at the well to wash ; their elders fetched water in basins and prepared indoors. Punctually, the supper bell rang ; they trooped in gaily to the banquet.

No one had missed Anna. Martha believed she was down at the pond with the duck-girls, but they no longer remembered when she had left them to return to the house.

Earth and evening moved to a slow reluctant rhythm ; the sun had almost run its flaming course, still it lingered on, spilling gold on the sky. A breeze blew coolly.

The people of Treuen sat down at the table, pleased to rest at the end of their day's work, hungry and glad of the food they were about to eat. Emma emerged from the house and, with the help of a girl, swung a tub of wine on to a trestle. Laughter echoed through the room. Emma returned to the kitchen. Presently she reappeared with a great tureen. All of them waited for the master and mistress to take their places. Christian came first ; Martha followed, her face shining.

They folded their hands, waited for the sound of Anna's voice saying grace, the signal for them to start eating. No sound came. Here and there someone looked up : silence.

A sense of disaster hung over them. They pressed their

hands together, bowed their heads and waited, dread in their hearts.

There was a pause. Suspense. Christian looked up.

" Where is Anna ? " he asked.

Martha started up guiltily. She was afraid to move ; she could only cast a glance of entreaty at Emma. The servant rose to her feet and hurried into the house, leaving the others in silence and apprehension.

Only Karl and Fritz at the far end of the table held a whispered consultation about the best means of lighting the bonfire. Emma returned ; she had searched the house from cellar to attic and had found no sign of Anna.

The master parted his hands :

" You can all say grace for yourselves and start eating ! " he said.

Their lips moved silently. Then they began to eat. But anxiety and fear held them back.

" Where was she last ? " Christian asked.

" She went down to the pond," Martha whispered.

The meal went on. Christian spoke no word. But his eyes roamed about the table. Presently they had all finished. Down came their forks . . . spoons. . . . They looked at him, waiting for orders.

The master rose ; his people followed.

" *For what we have received* . . ." A shuffle . . . voices. . . . " What was Anna doing by the pond ? " Christian asked Friederike, Minna.

" We play together. She gave us cake, then she went away with Fritz."

The girls trembled . . . tears welled up in their eyes. . . .

" Fritz said he was going to show her a bird's nest ! " Minna put in.

" Fritz, come here."

" Where did you see Anna last ? "

" At the pond, Master."

" You left the pond together ? "

" I didn't see, Master. I had such a big load of reeds on my back."

"Where's the nest you showed her?"

"I never showed her any nest; I didn't know there was one."

One after another, the master questioned the farm-hands.

"Did you see her?"

"No!"

"Did you see the child?"

"No, Master!"

"Did you?"

"No."

"You?"

"No."

"You?" . . .

Then, Christian asked:

"Have any of you seen a stranger around here to-day?"

"I did, Master," Fritz said. "I saw a beggar in the yard just before milking time."

The mowers who had worked in Section 7 nodded. Yes, they had seen a man slinking away over the fields into the forest.

"Scatter about . . . look for her. . . . Everybody!" Christian said.

They moved off in all directions. The men pressed through the fields, through the wheat that stood, high as a child. The women scoured the gardens, parting the bushes, beating the hedges. Ever and ever the child's name rang across the air; now hopeful, coaxing; now impatient. Surely, she was hiding. Or, perhaps she had fainted. Who saw her? Night, falling over Treuen, brought no answer.

It was ten o'clock and pitch-black when they came back to the yard. Martha was leaning against the doorway weeping. She could see the child, hidden in a corner, mischievous, laughing, then falling asleep, and, waking up afraid of the dark, calling for her mother with her little arms outstretched.

Christian stood in the yard as the men came back from fields and meadows.

"No sign of her, Master!"

"No sign of her! . . ."

"Nothing . . . nothing . . ."

"She may have fallen into the pond or in one of the ditches," Christian said calmly.

"God forbid!" Blank said, gulping.

Karl had caught the prevailing excitement, without fully realising what was amiss. Suddenly, his clear shrill voice rang across the shadows:

"Let me light the bonfire, father. Then we can see better."

"Make haste," Christian told him.

Joyfully, the boy sped off, thankful that no shadow would mar his celebration and cheat him out of his bonfire. As he reached it, he noticed Fritz squatting behind it, hiding.

"Why aren't you helping them look for Anna?" he asked.

"Oh, what's the use!" Fritz said.

Karl poured the petrol over the fire; Fritz struck the spark; soon the high, bright flames shot up from the crackling pile.

"Perhaps we can see her now," Karl said softly, worried about his little sister now that the excitement of the bonfire had been granted.

"No," Fritz said, "you won't find her . . . you won't find her ever again."

He spoke so softly that the crackling of the wood almost swallowed up his words; only his faint, high tone seemed to hang in the air.

The flickering firelight illumined the landscape; the search began anew, in ghostly contrast to the activities of the day. Men and women hurried hither and thither, their shadows now looming enormous, now gone; faces and hands emerged into the bright light, then were lost in the utter darkness. Andreas, the fisherman, came up from the pond, which he had dragged by the light of the bonfire to no avail. Now he noticed that a plank in the well-cover had

come loose. In spite of their fatigue, all hands turned to the well and pumped it dry.

By one o'clock, still they had found no trace of the child. The bonfire had burned down to a few smouldering ashes. It was St. John's night, a narrow span of darkness between the lingering night and the restless urgent dawn. The searchers rested, spent with their exertions and with a certain fear they dared almost not acknowledge to themselves. Some strange foreboding—they could not tell what—robbed them of hope. They sat about in disconsolate groups, their hands dangling limply by their sides, their eyes fixed on the ground or closed in sleepless exhaustion.

At Treuen that night, two people alone slept.

Fritz, weary from the heat of the bonfire, had slipped off to his room and fallen into a deep sleep. Sitting by the child's cot, Martha wept in her dream. She fancied she was a girl, in the shop ; it was evening and the lamp was lighted. The door opened and Christian entered, bearing a huge bouquet of flowers with wide blossoms. As she took them from his hand, the child Anna sprang out of every blossom, and all the little figures came crowding about her, the warmth of their bodies rising to her heart, lulling her sleep with their sweet ardour. But Christian was nowhere to be seen.

As for Christian, he stood in the doorway, his body exhausted, pain alone keeping him upright. Mercilessly the thought pursued him that his child was dead, that it was her corpse he sought, and that, if he found her, it would be only to lay her in the grave. He knew no reason or explanation for his thought ; but tears and hope would not come to him. He had clasped his hands and sought to pray ; that too proved impossible. In this bitter hour, God had abandoned him ; now, he felt the hand of death upon his heart.

As the others searched, hour-long, to Christian it was a search for death, for a corpse . . . and darkness . . .

Dawn . . . birdsong. . . .

They resumed the search. In groups of five and six, they

beat the countryside. The moles darted forth from their hills. But the men, silent, ominous, moved on.

Elsewhere, Andreas and others dragged the waters again. Nothing . . . nothing. . . . Still others searched the house, turned over every barrel, emptied every sack ; others again parted every bush, shook every tree, combed every nook and corner.

At seven o'clock they all met again in the yard, having searched for three hours, thirty strong. Fritz, in the meanwhile, had risen, opened the stalls and stables and begun to attend to the cattle.

Upstairs, in her room, the mother woke. For a long time, she could not tell what was the matter . . . why this morning was so different from other mornings. At noon, she heard Christian drive home. Her heart beat. Voices, confusion. . . . She went to the window, saw Christian standing among the farmers. There she was, alone. Suddenly, she felt immensely hungry and realised that no one had asked for her or called her, that no one was interested in her. Had she not given the child birth ? Was she too not entitled to help ?

Dinner in the kitchen downstairs was soon over and the search resumed.

" Master," said Blank, the steward, " it's no use looking any more. Anyhow, it's just as well we found no trace : it means the worst has happened—some gipsy made off with her, that's what, Master, some gipsy. Anna's just the pretty little child they'd fancy, ay, that's it ! "

There was a general cry of relief. All agreed. Yes, that was it : the gipsies.

" We'll find her yet ! " Blank added.

Again, night fell. The necessary work was done, inevitably, weary as they were. Fritz had taken no part in the search. But now he tried to help everyone.

There was nothing more they could do. Christian went upstairs, entered his bedroom, saw his wife there, sleeping. He stood looking down at her. Now it was neither dark, nor

light ; outside, the summer twilight ; within, Martha, who was infinite night. The darkness of his childhood returned ; he was lost again in darkness . . . evil . . . and there was a stranger there, fighting against his God.

Christian moved toward the window. Anna—where was Anna ?

The air was warm and still : earth rested, heavy with summer fruitfulness. The stars bloomed luminous in the meadows of heaven.

About the lonely watcher, men and beasts slept.

CHAPTER II

The morning of June twenty-sixth was golden. Out of a sound sleep, Martha suddenly awoke to the radiance about her. Without moving, she turned her eyes toward the window where her husband knelt, his chin propped on the ledge, his head strained back, his gaze fixed on the sky. She called to him softly; he did not move. Against the sunlight, his broad shoulders and powerful neck stood out. Then, suddenly she noticed that his hair had turned white overnight. She ran to him, shook his shoulder. He would have risen but all power seemed to have abandoned his great frame; he sought to lift his weight from the window-sill but his arms trembled, faltered, his knees gave way, he sank with a thud to the ground. Martha tried to help him up and reached for his hand. But at the first touch of her plump soft fingers, he sprang to his feet, loomed high above her. His white disordered hair fell over his broad forehead; his eyelids, closing over the weary eyes, almost hid them; his mouth was lost in the stubble of thick beard, dark as his hair had been. He moved away, as he might have moved from a stranger, drew his hand away, and, passing Anna's empty cot without so much as a glance, left the room. Martha did not move. No tears came to her eyes; she felt no need of them for she could not recognise adversity. Smiling, confident that all would turn out for the best, she straightened out the crumpled clothes she had slept in, twisted her hair in a knot.

It was five o'clock. The household was already astir. The stables were opened, the shepherds drove out their flocks, lambs and kids frisked over the pastures, the cows gathered for milking.

The master stood in his accustomed place in the farmhouse doorway, where he had always stood, all these years;

but his strange appearance, his white head, won him the sympathy of all his servants. The work went on, listlessly, hopelessly. A sense of disaster hovered over them. Yet the master's inward indifference was soon communicated to the others. In the past, he had unfailingly watched, thought, planned for them all : now they noticed that he let the long line of herds and flocks go past him without counting them, his hollow eyes roaming over the remnants of the bonfire, the muddy tracks left by those who had searched the yard, the cornfield through which they had trampled. But Barn 4 was left untouched. Its doors stood open. Now and again a bird, flying in a wide arc, a straw in its beak, flashed out of the light into the darkness, or darted out into the light again, winging towards the cornfields. On the dark roof there was a bright patch where Güse had mended it.

Andreas, the fisherman, crossed the hall and stood by Christian.

" Hadn't we better try once more, Master? " he whispered.

Christian did not move. A long moment passed before he could summon an answer.

" Yes," he breathed, " look again ! "—his lips barely able to frame the words. " Sometimes it takes three days before things rise to the surface. Do anything you must ! "

But the fisherman stood gazing at his master's white hair, motionless. Christian turned aside, entered the parlour, shutting the door noiselessly. He fell into the chair by his desk, bowed his head wearily. He felt empty, now, lost ; his heart was dead, earth had ceased to exist ; God was a mockery, a hollow word. Ruin and annihilation lay about him ; only he, Christian, remained alive. But his back was not bowed ; his shoulders were broad, strong enough to bear the burden of life, to resist its blows. He raised his head and drew out the top drawer of the desk slowly. Out of it he took an oblong cash-box, and opened it. It was divided into several compartments that held coins sorted according to their kind, gold, silver, copper and foreign pieces. He lifted off the top section ; below, all his papers lay carefully

folded, the deed of lease for Treuen, the marriage certificate, the children's certificates of birth and baptism.

Christian spread the papers out before him and read them through. He opened the ledgers of farm and household accounts and the five bank-books, one for each of the family, scanned the dates against the deposits. For each birthday, each Christmas, each occasion of a recovery from childhood illness, he had added to the sums. In the mother's book appeared entries of five hundred marks against the date of each child's birth, a gift he had kept secret. The fruit of his own labour, translated into money, amounted to twenty thousand marks. Now his land yielded him four times more than before ; the returns from his stock alone paid the wages of his many servants, the purchase and repair of the farm equipment, his charities, the children's expenses and the rental.

Christian examined all these records carefully, checked the figures ; the labours of his youth and the fruit they bore passed through his mind ; once more the pageant of his life passed across his imagination, each detail accurate, true. . . . He took up the last small black-covered book whose label bore the legend " Klara Charlotte Anna Scheffel." On the first page, in the left-hand corner, he had written : " God bless our child ! " On the right-hand side, there were nine entries, some of fifty, some of one hundred marks. Christian held the book in his hands for a long time ; then he put it back into the box, took a sheet of paper and wrote his will :

> " *The last will and testament . . . being of sound mind . . . in favour of Martha, my wife, and my sons, Karl and Gustav . . .* "

Amid the general disturbance, Fritz, methodical and hard-working as ever, resented the difference in spirit about the farm. Emma told him to clean the yard, which displeased him, because he had already decided what he was to do. Yet he obeyed her, hastening to fetch broom and

bucket. The sun beat down unmercifully ; a stench rose from the damp manure. On and on Fritz worked.

For the fourth time that morning, Fritz passed by the door of Barn 4. A bird whirred out of the blackness, twittering as it skimmed his head. Fritz stood stock-still, peering into the barn. Something had happened to him in there ; in that secret darkness he had done something . . . something he had never done before. . . . He was no longer a child ; he was a man now. He ran his hands over his clothes. Had he not undone them that day ? Shame possessed him ; he stole softly across the threshold. No, everything was safe, orderly. And it was warm . . . and so dark that nothing could be distinguished. . . . He could not remember Anna ; when the others mentioned her, it was as though they spoke of someone he did not know, someone he had never known. There was neither pain nor love to people the utter loneliness to which he was now condemned. But, by the same token, there was no sense of guilt, no pangs of conscience. At night, weary, he slept the sleep of the just.

Nobody at Treuen mourned more passionately over Anna's disappearance than Emma. Her helplessness tortured her in this crisis. And the child's loss was no calamity of a general order ; it was quite unlike an illness, for instance, sent by God's hand, or a death, before which one bowed in submission.

The door opened : Fritz staggered in, bearing a large tubful of water ; very carefully he set the tub down on the bench by the stove, spilling never a drop. He stood up, started off to his work at once but Emma called him. As he turned his gentle, sensitive face towards her, Emma gazed lovingly at him, admired his height, his strength, his goodness. Swiftly she made towards him, pressed him to her. Suddenly, for the first time, she seemed to realise how much more he meant to her than the other children, even though she had always sought to make no difference between them. He was hers, flesh of her flesh, blood of her blood. The bitter pangs of his conception and bearing became reincarnate in her at that moment ; and the joy, too, that she had found

in his being. And a new joy rose in her as she thanked God that Fritz had been spared the tragic fate of Anna ; that he had grown so tall, so handsome, so good ; that he lived by her side, and that even now she could crush him in her arms. As she stroked his golden head, over and over, a sense of Martha's sorrow came over her.

Fritz stood still, locked in his mother's arms. He could hear her heart beating ; it filled him with a deep, rich quietude to feel the rhythmic coursing of his mother's blood so close against him. Everything, he felt was right now ; this love of Emma's had washed away all sense of evil. Passionately he pressed his cheek harder against her breast.

In the meanwhile, the members of the Coroner's Commission had crossed the parlour. Early that morning they had received word of the exhaustive investigations conducted at the farm ; now they had been all over the ground for themselves. It was virtually certain, therefore, that the child had been abducted. Had they not questioned everyone on the place ? Had not query after query met with a truthful answer. To be sure, Fritz had known a moment of hesitation when one of the officials repeatedly asked whether Fritz were absolutely certain that he had not seen Anna anywhere before she went with him to the barn.

" Besides," the official urged, " what was all that talk about a bird's nest ? "

" I don't know."

" But I gathered . . . "

" I don't know—I didn't see anything ! I don't know anything about a bird's nest."

The anger of the officials rose at Fritz's answers. But Christian came forward, laid his hand on Fritz's shoulder and : " He's a good boy," he said quietly. " He grew up in my house." Suspicion was therefore directed towards a beggar who had been sighted in the yard, an old man with a red streak about his neck—this much was agreed upon—but whether the red streak was a scarf or wound, nobody knew.

The official wrote his report, read it aloud and the proper

signatures were duly appended. He promised they would hear news of the child, assured them no pains would be spared in shedding light upon the mystery. The very heavy reward Christian had offered stimulated the police, urged the public to co-operate and aroused universal admiration. The first clue to follow was the beggar about whom so many people had testified ; next, information must be obtained about the gipsies who had been in the neighbourhood. The spokesman of the Coroner's Commission, just as he was leaving, turned around, and, seeking to spare the father as much as possible, stammered :

" Have you considered . . . do you think . . . this kidnapping . . . has it occurred to you that the motive may have been . . . murder ? "

" Yes," Christian said evenly. " Yes : we must do our best to find out."

" You may rely on us," the official said. " Whatever the crime, we shall do our best ! "

The police left the room, brushing by Martha who stood leaning against the door. Now Christian and Martha were alone in the silent room. Christian sank into a chair, his head bowed.

From the door, Martha called his name.

He did not answer, gave no sign of having heard. He raised his head. He seemed unable to speak, to open his weary eyes. Martha moved towards him, took his white head between her hands.

" Don't fret, Christian : things will be all right. I am here . . . you have your wife."

Gently, he thrust her away.

" What was between us is over now . . . we must not wish for it any more," he said in a dead voice.

" Anna may come back," Martha said. " And . . . Anna belongs to me, too. . . . Oh, everything will turn out all right."

" We must learn to bear affliction," he answered.

" Oh, but Christian, how can I ? " And again, she whispered :

" Christian ! "

He rose and left the room without a word. Martha stared after him. With him, her happiness seemed to have gone. Her expression changed ; she glanced wildly about her, saw nothing. Her lids ached. Two deep grooves lined her cheeks. The bell rang for dinner. Martha went to the kitchen. The hands trooped in, slipped into their places quietly, cast furtive glances at the master . . . the mistress. . . . Not a glance rose from the plates. . . .

Young Karl and Gustav, with Fritz, rushed in late. They looked at each other only, avoiding contact with their parents, a nameless dread hugging their hearts. Christian served, then said :

" Someone must say grace . . . we've neglected it lately."

Emma tried to speak ; a sob, rising to her throat choked her.

" Say grace, Fritz," she whispered.

Fritz rose. He bowed his head. His warm, rich voice echoed through the room :

" *For what we are about to receive . . .* "

With a sense of relief, the servants rattled their spoons against their plates.

As usual, the meal was good and plentiful. But neither Christian nor Martha touched a morsel. A deep melancholy reigned. The others ate hurriedly, without pleasure, and left the table still hungry. But the three boys, who at first had toyed with their food, later set to with much appetite.

As the servants scattered, they sought to go as far as possible from the house, out of sight of master and mistress. They went to work hurriedly, carelessly : gone was their former zeal and joy in labour. They found themselves forming little groups, discussing the tragedy, how strangely Christian and Emma bore it, what anguish it worked upon them. They missed their master's encouragement, leadership and reward.

Nowadays, in the evening, silence fell upon them early. They scarcely conversed at meal-time, bolting down their

food and hurrying across the dark yard to their rooms. Nowadays, no one sat on the benches under the giant trees in the fragrant summer night ; no one walked by the silent pond.

Christian returned to the parlour, the only room in the house that reminded him of the days when he had lived here, lonely and alone. He had not slept for three nights ; a mortal weariness weighed him down. He stood in the middle of the room, his knees shaking, his body quavering. He wanted to lie down on the sofa, to rest ; but suddenly he remembered his wife's whispered summons that morning . . . hesitant, grieving, he went upstairs. For a long time he stood outside the door to the bedroom, tortured by the dread of having to enter, to feel his wife beside him, to face her dark glance and the child's cot, empty. The door was ajar ; Christian went in. In the moonless gloom, he could distinguish nothing ; but he heard his wife's deep fitful breathing. He could not see her, yet it seemed to him that the darkness about him was the darkness of her eyes. He groped his way across the room and lighted the candle. Suddenly Anna's cot loomed white, empty, before him. It seemed to him like a mysterious symbol of the tragedy which had come upon them, and he stood looking down at it, a prey to the confused emotions storming at his heart. Suddenly he looked up, saw his wife sleeping. In the candlelight, Christian's eyes looked not like eyes : they were dark, dead, mortal wounds under his brow. Martha lay face downward, buried in the pillows, her breath coming in heavy, anguished sobs. Christian blew out the candle ; now the darkness about him was no longer sinister but natural, soothing, a part of day. And out of darkness, light would break again.

Christian tiptoed back to the parlour, sank down on the narrow and cramping sofa and at last fell into a deep, dreamless sleep. Yet on awaking in the morning, his despair was unallayed, his limbs leaden with fatigue, his heart heavy within him, his mouth gaping, his ragged beard aslobber.

When, on the morrow, neither Christian nor Martha had put in an appearance as usual, Emma rejoiced, believing they must be asleep. She went out of her way to make sure that they should not be disturbed ; the work that morning went forward in silence. There was no quarrelling and chatter at the well when the servants came to wash ; the herdsmen drove their cattle swiftly out of the yard. Emma awakened the children, helped them to dress. She was sending them to town to market as a great treat. She measured the supplies, loaded her wares on the cart ; she let the butcher choose the best animals for slaughter, and the miller measure his own flour. But no one was allowed to bother the master. Amid all this activity and bustle, Fritz helped her ceaselessly, fetching and carrying, doing his own work, supervising that of others.

At ten o'clock there was still no sign of Christian and Martha ; Emma congratulated herself, stroked Fritz's hair approvingly. She was preparing a hasty lunch, when, looking up suddenly, she caught sight of Christian standing in the middle of the yard. His clothes were crumpled ; the hot sun beat down on his white head as he stumbled over towards the well, pumped the trough full of water and steeped his hands into it, holding them there for a long time, then plunged his face into the grateful coolness.

Emma was surprised and troubled ; the master had never himself washed at the well, nor suffered his children to do so. She ran up to the bedroom, opened the door softly. Martha lay on the bed, fully dressed, moaning into the pillows. Emma touched her ; she did not awaken. Then Emma took her gently by the shoulder and turned her over. Martha's eyes remained obstinately shut, her face swollen and flushed. Her mouth hung open ; her breath came in gasps and moans. Supposing her to be a prey to bad dreams, Emma considered it wise to wake her. She wrung a towel out in cool water and laid it on Martha's breast. With a low cry, Martha awoke, looked down, saw her breast bared. She turned her head towards her husband's place ; he was not there. Her eyes sought the cot at her feet, empty :

the child gone. She had ceased to be a wife, she would never be a mother again.

Then she caught sight of Emma gazing sadly at her ; Martha rose, flung aside the damp cloth, arranged her dress. Emma moved off to the kitchen : " They weren't together last night ! " she murmured sadly. " Why have they drifted apart ? They were so perfect in the old days . . . "

Christian went out into the fields, where the wheat rustled and ripened in the hot noon sun. Far as the eye could reach, the ears stood tall, uniform. A fine crop ; they could begin to reap soon ; and they could plant the winter rye early this year. Further along, he came across Blank, the steward, who was so overjoyed to see his master in the fields again that he took off his broad straw hat and waved a greeting.

" Morning, Master ! " he called, looking shyly up at Christian. " Pretty good, eh ? An early crop ! "

" Yes," said Christian, " you might begin mowing the week after next."

" Middle of the week or end ? " Blank asked. " I'll have to know so I can hire the extra hands."

" Middle or end," the master repeated dully, as he moved off.

Blank looked ruefully after him : " Can't speak to him any more," he said to himself, " he's a good master but he's beginning to lose his grip on things. . . ."

Christian did not return for dinner, but the mistress was in her place as usual. She served the others and even ate a little herself. The boys had not come back from town, but she seemed not to have noticed it, as she sat staring ahead, seeing nothing. As Fritz began to say grace, she shuddered, turned and gazed piercingly at him. After the meal, she went into the garden ; Emma saw her there, wandering aimlessly up and down. When she did not come in, Emma, going after her, found that Martha had heard no one calling.

It was long after four when Christian returned ; the cows had been milked some time before. Christian made straight

for his cool, dim parlour, where he found the bread and milk Emma had set out for him. Having eaten and drunk, he made for his desk and counted out the money for his servant's wages. He must pay them to-morrow—Saturday. The week had run its cycle of sorrow. He stood before the bookshelves, his eyes wandering over the titles. At the end of one row stood a heavy black volume, bearing across its broad back the legend : HOLY BIBLE. For a long time, Christian gazed at it.

No one saw him again until dinner on the morrow, when he took his place next to Martha and ate with them all. Again and again, his gaze wandered over the boys' faces. When the meal was over :

" Church to-morrow for all of you," he said. " You can take the big wagon ! "

Then he left the house and returned to the fields.

A sense of deep relief followed his words. A certain serenity returned to the men's faces ; the women breathed audibly again ; tears rose to Emma's eyes. The servants felt happy at the prospect of driving to church, of escaping from the distress of Treuen for an hour or two ; they longed to lay the burden of their discomfort at God's feet and find solace in submitting to His will. A feeling of energy, of action came upon them. They set to discussing who was to go, who to stay ; each hoped that the indispensable household work would fall to another. They crowded into the yard near the door to the servants' quarters ; brushed their clothes, polished their shoes, carried water from the well to their rooms for baths. In secret, they relighted the fires in the kitchen, warmed water on them and heated irons to press out their white aprons and kerchiefs.

Only two people of all the folk at Treuen failed to respond to the general animation ; indeed, Fritz and Martha were utterly unaware of it.

Emma kept Martha by her, did her best to occupy her mind every minute, gave her instructions as one would to a child. She made her put out Christian's Sunday clothes and linen and the boys' things, suggested errands for her to do

about the house, while she herself brought the master's bed-linen down and made him a bed on the parlour-sofa, hung out his clothes over a chair and laid fresh linen on the table. She brought a basin of water, laid soap and towels beside it, so that he would not need to go to the well again to wash.

Slowly, darkness fell upon the farm, and silence. Nobody knew whether the master had returned to the farm or not. Martha made straight for her bedroom upstairs, Emma locked up cellar and kitchen and fell into a sleep of utter exhaustion.

Christian awoke early. A radiant Sunday morning. He had returned late the night before ; he felt rested after his night's sleep. His eyes drank in the glory of sky and earth ; his ears thrilled to the matin-song of the birds. An odour of grain, ripening, filled the room. Christian's blood tingled as he plunged his hands and face into the water ; suddenly he was surprised to find himself hungry. He enjoyed the coolness of the fresh linen against his skin ; an acute sense of life returned to him ; he could feel it pulsing in his veins. Yet disaster was there, too : his hearth and household lay in ruins about him. Sleep had healed him, brought back his strength, roused his sluggish mind ; but it had also stirred his stunned senses to a keener appreciation of his pain. Grief tore ever more sharply at his soul.

His thought returned to his own father and mother ; of a sudden he found himself reverting to the scenes and happenings of his youth. His parents ! They had lived and toiled, tasted sorrow and joy, reared their children in the light of their faith, died in peace, even as they had lived. He, too, had toiled ; he too had harmed no one he knew of, he too had lived as they, asking God's blessing on the crops he sowed, giving thanks to heaven for the harvests he reaped, faithfully observing such days as were holy, exhorting his children to keep God's commandments. Ay, he too had believed in the justice of a God he knew and built his life upon that firm foundation. Yet a cruel fate had overtaken his child, without him even knowing whether

its fury aimed at Anna, or, through some helpless and innocent gesture of hers, wished to punish him for some crime he had committed in ignorance or long ago forgotten. How? What? That he could not tell. But in his hour of need, he had called upon God, and God had made no answer.

But as he dressed for church, Christian felt a vestige of faith stirring within him and an ardent hope that he might gather some consolation in the words of Holy Writ. He would bow his head, a willing sacrifice; he would take up his burden of suffering without a murmur; he would even accept the horror of his memory of Anna, if, in this pit of gloom, he could recover the God he had lost, the God Who awed him yet Whose Truth he had worshipped all the days of his life.

He heard a bustle about the house. The servants were coming in to breakfast. As he entered the kitchen, he saw Emma and Fritz setting the table. The boy was already dressed for church. He came towards Fritz.

"Please, Master, may I drive to-day?"

The wraith of a smile passed over the master's face.

"Yes," he said, "you may drive the greys."

Fritz's eyes gleamed with joy as he thanked him.

Emma found her mistress in the bedroom, kneeling by the chest, holding her black silk wedding-dress in her hands.

"Are you going to put on your silk dress, mistress?" she asked, startled.

Martha looked first at her, then at the dress. Then, closing the chest with a bang: "I won't go into mourning," she answered in a low voice.

"Why don't you wear your blue linen?" Emma said softly, much as a mother might coax a daughter. "It'll be lighter in this heat."

Then she fetched the dress from the wardrobe and laid it out on the bed, while Martha nodded obediently.

The vehicles stood in the yard, shining and clean, the harness twinkling in the sunlight. Fritz had his wagon

ready first ; he stood leaning against the horse whistling softly to himself, cracking his whip. To drive afforded him an immense pleasure.

Christian took his seat on the box, gathered the reins. Karl and Gustav climbed up shyly and huddled against each other, waiting for their mother. At last Martha appeared, leaning heavily on Emma's arm, wearing her blue dress, a broad-brimmed brown straw hat shading her face. She swayed a little as she walked. Christian leaned down towards her to lift her into the seat. She quivered at his touch ; the blood rushed to her face, though her features never relaxed. Still she looked forward stonily. The wrinkles across her brow were as though stamped there by a brand ; her eyes, levelled ever ahead, were blind, as though made of bronze. If she did not vouchsafe him a glance, at least she reached for his hand and held it in hers until they arrived at the church. Here, they at once became the centre of a crowd, the cynosure of all eyes. Men and women came up, shook their hands, sought for words of sympathy and comfort, even offered advice. As they made for their pew, every eye followed them.

" It's as though I were a bride ! " Martha thought.

The organ played the opening notes of the hymn ; the choir, boys and girls, sang in the narrow loft, Fritz's voice, high and tender and true, above them.

It was a simple church, with whitewashed walls, its white stone altar as flat and bare as a table ; the cross was of plain gold. There was no Christ upon it ; the person of Jesus, the miracle of His birth and the revelation of His resurrection were less close to the hearts and creed of this congregation than God, His Father, the Creator, omnipotent and omniscient, in Whose hands were mercy and wrath.

During the hymn, the pastor had entered the pulpit. Nobody had seen him move, yet suddenly he loomed before their sight, high above them.

The pastor was a short, stocky man, the product of three successive generations of clergymen. He had no children ;

he lived a retired life save for the duties of his pastorate. His sermons never deviated from the models in his theological books.

" Let us pray," he said, when the hymn was over. The congregation rose.

" O Lord our God, blessed heavenly Father, as we now come before Thee in all humility to praise Thy fearful yet merciful Word, we do pray that the light of the Holy Ghost so shine upon us as to open our eyes to the wonder of Thy deeds ; that, through Thy word, it may flourish and magnify in my heart, ridding my will, that I may rejoice over Thy wonders, in praise, honour and glory to Thee for ever and ever, Amen."

" Amen," the congregation repeated.

Christian sat up, his eyes fastened in anguish on the pastor's face. He heaved a sigh. Here, he felt he was no longer Christian Scheffel, the master of Treuen ; his sense of human identity left him completely ; a power within him raised him. It was as though his soul opened, his spirit soared into another world, there to meet the spirit of his lost child. Now he was strong to endure all pain. As the pastor read the lesson, Christian listened to the words, profoundly stirred. The words crowded in upon him ; it was oppressive, more almost than he could bear. He heard the pastor's voice.

" . . . And Moses spake unto the Lord, saying . . . And the Lord answered him, saying : No man may see My countenance . . . and the Lord said . . . but no man may see My countenance. . ."

Christian fell back into the pew, his forehead streaming, his head sunk over his breast. His groans, echoing through the silence of the church, were bitter and eloquent as the grief of all the world.

In the congregation, the people whispered together sympathetically. Here and there a deep sigh bespoke their compassion. For Christian's was a sorrow such as none of

them had ever suffered at the hands of God or Nature. They had known sickness, poverty, death, war, even ; but this was different, and they understood that the wretched father waited for a consoling answer. They hung on the pastor's words, waiting with Christian.

In the choir loft, Fritz pushed his way past the others to the stone railing. He must not miss a word. He looked forward to the afternoon when he would repeat the gist of the sermon for his mother ; he learned by rote easily and his memory was excellent.

Karl and Gustav sat in the pew next to their parents, lost in prayer. The sorrows that had afflicted them seemed now to have vanished ; their resiliency protected them from discouragement, bolstered up their faith.

Martha's face glowed, her lips moved in a painful effort to smile. She stared, her glance levelled at the tall stained glass window where Christ blessed the little children. This picture had met her gaze the first time she entered the church as Christian's bride. Now, as formerly, the pastor's words held no meaning for her. Once she had stood there, lost in a daze of happiness, soaring above her surroundings, transfigured, alone. Now, too, she stood alone. Her feet rose and fell, tapping the flagstones as though she were running.

Christian felt her excitement, heard her feet racing up and down. A vast tenderness fell over him, mingled with his exaltation.

" We are all lost ! " he thought. And suddenly the old vision swam before his eyes ; suddenly she stood before him, his pride, the beloved, passionate mistress of his heart. Any happiness she had known came from him ; now, all was over ; she stood alone and he must let her go. Once there had been a rich sense of fulfilment in divinity and a feeling of order ; now nothing remained save a longing for death.

" *No man may see God's countenance . . .*"

The words stormed his brain, flowed over him in a wave of coldness, death.

Ay, death ; that was all he had to live for now. In the

dread darkness of the inevitable hour, a darkness more utter than even that gloom that had haunted his boyhood, he would at last see ; God would make clear His inscrutable ways and account for His keeping of Anna's soul. Ay, in the splendour of his new faith, he would be vouchsafed a sight of the divine countenance. Weary, yet at peace, Christian raised his head. The pastor pronounced the benediction. Then the church emptied quickly.

The silent harvest fields stretched out in long waves on either side of the white, dusty roads ; they quivered in the noonday air. The little brooks by the meadows were all dry, their banks still lined with withering flowers. No bird sang in the empty sky. The landscape seemed deserted save where the carts moved homeward.

Eight days had passed now since Anna's disappearance. Far abroad through the land people knew of the loss ; thousands of them, strangers, knew her by sight from the notices posted about her, spoke her name, prayed that she might be traced. Yet in the home where she had lived all her life there was not even a little grave. It seemed as though she was already forgotten, without trace, save for the heavy anguish in those who had known her.

CHAPTER III

The police station of the Graulitz district was first apprised of Anna's disappearance and at once relayed the news. By June 25th, every station within a wide radius of Treuen had been notified. On July 3rd, and for four weeks thereafter, notices appeared in all the newsapers every other day and large posters were put up in public places. These read :

ABDUCTION

2,500 MARKS REWARD

On June 24th, at three o'clock in the afternoon, the four-year-old daughter of Christian Scheffel of Treuen, near Ostenwald, in the district of Graulitz, disappeared from her home. Since a thorough search of Treuen and its neighbourhood has brought no clue to light and since nothing points to either an accident or crime, it is suspected that the child was kidnapped by a band of gipsies or some other persons unknown.

Christian Scheffel, her father, hereby offers a reward of 2,500 *Marks for the return of the child.*

Anna Scheffel is four years old, three feet six in height, tall and slight for her age but of healthy appearance. Her arms, legs and face are well-rounded but not plump. She has large blue eyes ; a smooth forehead ; a small, slightly turned-up nose ; a small mouth, with all her teeth save her four rear molars. Her hair is fair and curly, held back from her forehead by a comb of dark tortoiseshell.

The child when last seen was wearing a dress of thin woollen plaid, green and red, the skirt pleated, the bodice buttoned on to it. The bodice is low-necked, with long sleeves trimmed with small mother-of-pearl buttons. She wore white wool stockings with red stripes and black, buttoned shoes. All the clothes she wore when last seen were new.

A distinguishing mark is a scar on her left breast.
Any information that might prove of assistance should be reported at the nearest police-station.

These posters, a yard square and printed in heavy ink, stood in all railway-stations, inns, public conveyances and buildings. In the upper left-hand corner was Anna's photograph, that picture she had feared to have made. Now, enlarged to four times its original size, it struck the eye everywhere—out of shop windows, show cases, in displays, from all sorts of places in village or town. People crowded about it, elbowing each other as they sought to catch a glimpse of Anna's face, straining as heavily as they would had some Royal Prince suddenly appeared in their midst. Shortly, of course, public curiosity and interest found itself reflected in all manner of reports. The child had been sighted here . . . there . . . someone had been told that someone else had seen . . . that someone . . . Invariably, the reports supplied plausible, often startlingly accurate descriptions of the child. The possibility of further abductions disappeared ; elsewhere no children had been reported lost. And again and again, message came in after message, so many that all could not be properly investigated.

On July 8th, just as they were about to harvest, the first news of discovery reached Treuen in the shape of a telegram summoning Christian to Holtzengrübe.

For a long time, Christian held the paper in his hand. He closed his eyes, praying for an echo in his heart, a stir of hope. Nothing . . . nothing. . . .

On July 9th, at five in the morning, Christian set out stealthily. Only Emma was with him when he left ; she gave him food to take with him, handed him his bag. In it she had placed a child's bodice made by her that night out of the remnants of the material that had gone to make the dress Anna had last worn. This, in Emma's mind, was to be proof positive in case the gipsies had clad the child in other clothes to avoid recognition.

Fritz drove. The master stopped first at Schweinachstein ;

here he deposited and registered his last will and testament. Then he took the stage to Erdenmittel, the nearest railway station. Since leaving Treuen, a strange feeling had come over him. It was as if he walked, talked and acted through the mists of a dream ; all within him was part of a vast emptiness, midway between sleep and waking. How long was it since he had seen a railway-station ? . . . The train was about to start, yet he did not hurry, though he knew he must. . . . Like a child, he was now, like the boy he had been, going home from school. Suddenly as he strode down the platform, his gaze caught a large white poster ; he read the legend : ABDUCTION. 2,500 MARKS REWARD and below —dear God !—the picture of the child ! In his anguish, he rushed towards the train, reaching it barely in time.

He awoke suddenly, to feel the cool breath of the waves against his face, the scent of the seas in his nostrils. Away to the right lay the town, its dark angular towers lost in the mist, and the river, below, a-shimmer in the dawn. Trees bowed their branches, low-drooping, over its banks ; ships and boats nestled down against the waters, rising and falling to the rhythm of the tide, their masts rising like the velvet dark spires of churches, faintly sighted across the twilight. Slowly the train crawled over the bridge and river ; ships, boats, fell away and were lost. Dark clumps of trees rose to Christian's vision. Lights flared up in the night ; in a meadow on the outskirts of the city, he saw crowds of people, voices, laughter and music. There was a blare of music, a haze amid which gaily-dressed men and women moved to and fro. Then, suddenly, as the drums rolled, the fireworks exploded and the people shouted ; Christian saw his child, her arms spread, her hands fluttering like wings . . . she was moving from him, swaying over a rope that vanished in the darkness.

The train rounded a curve, the picture faded from his sight. Now night enfolded them as he sat, motionless, silent, incapable of knowing whether it had been a figment of his imagination or reality. . . .

About an hour later, he reached Euchensee. Here at

the police-station, he was told that the gipsies had changed their route and that they had last been seen heading past Orst, towards Alhausen, where they were reported to have established their camp. Alhausen lay an hour away. It was said that they intended to move in the opposite direction on the morrow ; but all were agreed that the child had been seen with them as recently as yesterday.

An hour later, Christian reached the camp, sighted a little girl walking a tight-rope, believed it was his child. Returning, he held long discussions with the officials, agreed to accompany them the following morning and meet the gipsies as they reached Reuterkreutz. Reuterkreutz proved to be a town an hour's run from the sea, with a fair-sized market-place, a good school, city-hall and prison. The police spread about the town, some placed at points of vantage where they could observe the gipsies as they arrived, others so posted as to cut off any possibility of a retreat.

It was noon when the gipsy caravan filed into sight ; slowly it advanced across the sweltering heat. There were two horses to each wagon ; dogs jumped and barked about their heels ; behind them came the gipsies, on foot, children and adults. As the caravan reached the town boundary, the police arrested the gipsies, searched the wagons on the spot and questioned the people. But never a sight of the lost child rewarded them. Then they counted the gipsies and arrested them : there were thirteen adults and seven children, the latter ranging between the ages of five and thirteen.

They discovered that the gipsies had spent some hours, the night before, at the spot Christian passed in the train. They had given a performance there, mostly conjuring and acrobatics ; but no one had a girl. To be sure there was a five-year-old boy, dressed in girl's clothes, who walked a tight-rope. A pink muslin dress and pink shoes were found, too ; but the little boy, pitifully small for his age, put on the shoes and clothes and ran up and down the ropes the gipsies hurriedly spread for him.

The investigation yielded no results, the gipsies were at once conveyed to prison and their wagons and stock

impounded. Such people as had testified to seeing the child and other suspicious characters had been conveyed to Euchensee.

The gipsies were brought here and heard first of all. To a man they denied having a little girl in their midst.

The investigation was carried on in great earnest and detail. Fact after fact was revealed, some significant, others trivial. At the time, the gipsies had travelled in two wagons, one black, one white. In the first wagon, two brothers lived with their wives and children ; in the second, the gipsy chief with his family and a deaf and dumb dwarf. The rest of the tribe followed on foot, sleeping in the open, or, if possible, in barn or wine-shop. The authorities believed that the tribesmen might have seized the child and concealed it. Yet no evidence existed to establish this.

Laboriously, the following depositions were taken and written into the Court record.

Schroeder, the first witness called to the bar, testified as follows :

" I was at Freese's, the tailor's, in Lübke, on July 1st, when a gipsy band came down the street. A moment after, an old Romany came into the shop begging for cast-off clothes and money. I saw three children sitting in the doorway ; I noticed one especially—a girl in a plaid dress with fair, curly hair. She might have been three years old—or four—or five. And I don't mind testifying, here and now, that I've seen no such child now."

The second witness, Frau Fischer from St. Leonhard, told her story :

" On July 5th, I was coming out of the woods near Bergreichenstein, where I had been walking. Near a tavern called ' At the Sign of the Jug,' I saw a gipsy camp. I wanted to get a closer view of the gipsies, so I walked towards their camp. The first thing that struck my sight was the wagon with the black tarpaulin cover. A pretty little child with light blue eyes and curly flaxen hair occasionally passed her head through the open door ; on each occasion, a little boy pushed her back, a little boy who stood by the

wagon. At one time, I'll swear I saw him throwing old clothes over her. As the gipsies were leaving, later in the day, I heard a child crying ; and my cousin Anna told me it was the child I had seen, the pretty fair-haired child. A child, I should judge, between three and four. . . . "

And so it went on, witness upon witness supplying detail after detail.

As Christian laid Anna's picture before them, all the witnesses affirmed : " We recognise in this picture the same child we saw with the gipsies."

Again and again the gipsies protested : they had no strange child among them.

On the morrow, the gipsy children were interrogated, and, though threatened with beating, they could provide only the following information :

The boy Franz : " When we were in Bergreichenstein, I remember I was standing by the black-covered wagon. There was a little girl inside ; she was smaller than I, and her face fatter. I remember I pushed her back into the wagon because she poked her face out all the time, trying to look out. Then I covered her with old clothes ; my aunt Rosa told me to, and that's the only reason why I did it. Later, in the wagon, the child started to scream again. But when we started out, she was not with us. Yesterday, she was not with us either. I don't know who took her away. . . ."

The next witness was a little girl of six, a child with thick black hair, richly curled. As she answered the various questions put to her, she kept dancing, shifting from foot to foot. " The little girl was not with us all the time. She was taller than we, her hair was fairer, her face broader. She never played with us ; she was always crying. . . . I never knew her name. . . . Some woman took her away. . . . I've never seen her since. . . ."

Suddenly a ten-year-old boy, with a pale lined face, forced his way forward ; of his own accord, he said :

" It was on Monday, I think, St. John's day. We came to a village about noon. There was a big manor-house ; Wenzel, my brother, and I went up to get a drink of water.

We came back to the wagons ; I saw my mother there with a child. She was hugging her tight against her bosom. The child wasn't screaming then. But later she screamed . . . when my mother put her in the wagon with us. . . . Then she screamed ! She wore a dress just like that dress in the picture. The child stayed in the black wagon all the way here. Every night my mother went away with her and she only came back in the morning. And Pauline was with her always. Three days ago, just as we were going to bed, I saw my mother wrap her in a sheet and make off with her. She went towards the village. Next day my mother came back, but the child wasn't with her. I heard her tell my father she'd killed it in the forest ; she said she choked her."

The Court threatened the accused women with dire punishment ; coaxed them ; promised, even, to reward them.

The men sat silently, stolidly ; occasionally, however, some swarthy Romany shrugged his shoulders. . . . An unintelligible murmur arose ; suddenly the gipsies broke into quarrels ; at last all their wrath was concentrated upon the two women who had been implicated. Then they grew violent, tore at each other's dresses, hit each other. One of the women who had been accused stood up, angry, her blouse in tatters, her breast bare. The young gipsies laughed, but the leader of the band now came between the women, tore them apart, muttered something low in their ears. At once they fell silent and ventured no further answer to the Court's questions.

At last, all of them were led off ; Court was adjourned until the morrow. That day, once more, to a man, they denied having seen a strange child. Now the Court proceeded to close the inquiry. The leader of the gipsies spoke up : since nothing had been proved against them, they must be released. But the Court shrugged its shoulders, just as the gipsies had done. And for three days they were held in custody ; spies were set among them. . . . They showed no signs of guilt ; very quiet, they were, sleeping most of the time. The mothers played with the children ; occasionally,

all of them sang in chorus. Not a suspicious word or sound came from them. Even those mothers who had been accused by their children forbore from recrimination.

At last they were summoned to Court again, and severely admonished. They eyed each other questioningly. Then, one by one, they began speaking, the youngsters, strangely enough, first. They admitted a child had been among them ; they even confessed that, as they saw Anna's picture, they recognised her. Yet they persisted in stating that they knew nothing of the child's disappearance and had never thought one way or another about its presence or absence.

The inquiry now was concentrated upon the two women implicated. They burst into sobs ; for a long time, no word would pass their lips. Then, amazingly, they admitted the murder but accused one another of it. Their stories were extraordinarily congruent.

" Yes," said one of them, " on June 24th, we crossed the forest by Treuen village. I saw the manor-house ; I slipped in and walked about the garden. After dinner, a little girl came out of the house and spoke to me. I couldn't make out a word she said. But she was pretty . . . she had blue eyes and golden hair. She looked like the child in this photograph. Both my children being boys, and I having no girl of my own, I took her with me : we ran through the woods to our wagons. I crawled into the white wagon with the child as quickly as I could : she didn't utter a sound. Later on, when we went back to the black wagon, I showed the child to my husband and he beat me. I've got the marks on me still. On July 6th we stopped at St. Leonhard, and the witness, Frau Fischer, came to the camp and saw the child. All my nephew Franz told you is true. I told him that if the child looked out of the window, he must push her back and throw a heap of old clothes over her. In the evening, I was told the police were after us because of the child. So at ten o'clock that night Pauline and I took the child into the woods with us. We took turns carrying her. We went about a hundred yards. Then Pauline told me to stay behind ; she went ahead with the child. After a while, all

of a sudden, I heard a frightful shriek. Then it was quiet. I thought Pauline had killed the child, but anyhow I asked : ' Where is it ? ' She told me it was dead."

While these confessions were being read aloud, the gipsies stood dumb and indifferent, worn out by their detention and the ordeal of cross-examination and trial. Suddenly the deaf and dumb dwarf began to behave strangely, making violent, insistent gestures. He was asked in sign language what was the matter ; but he could not understand. When shown the picture of the child, he made several vigorous gestures of denial ; he pointed at both women, shook his head again in vehement negation, his excitement visibly increasing ; now he hopped from one foot to the other, his great eyes rolling round and round in his little head. The police officers could not help laughing, so comical was the little gipsy. Proceedings were adjourned, the gipsies led away again.

On the morrow, Christian, the Police Inspector, the two women under suspicion and two policemen went back to Bergreichenstein. Here the host at " The Sign of the Jug " identified them instantly. " I swear I saw the woman called Rosalie, the one now standing before me, on the evening of July 5th. She crossed my yard and went off down the road. She was carrying a child in her arms. The other woman, Pauline, I did not see."

They began to search for the corpse of the child said to have been killed in the woods. Rosalie and Pauline were to reconstruct the scene of the murder as they had described it. But once more they fell to quarrelling violently, each accusing the other of the final deed. At last the woman Rosalie confessed that she had thrown the child into a little river on the other side of the woods, while Pauline insisted that, the day after the murder, she herself had gone secretly to the woods and buried the child under a large pine, covering the body with moss and heaping bluebells on the grave. For an entire week, the police made futile search but no trace of a body could be found.

During all this time, Christian had been staying at

a modest inn in the neighbourhood. He accompanied the police officials, attended the hearings, produced again and again the little bodice Emma had made or the picture of the lost child, questioned the witnesses tirelessly, imitated the child's characteristic gestures, showing how she used to throw back her head, how she laughed, moved, danced. . . . In the evening, Christian went into the hot, smoke-clouded taproom, sat among the noisy drinkers. Ordinarily so silent, now he entered into their conversation, criticised the progress of the hearings, abusing the officials, discussing, arguing, debating, citing the Scheffel Case as the very crux of the German judiciary system. Now he lived in a state beyond mere dreams ; it was a sort of delirium. He began drinking early in the morning and continued through the day. Alcohol induced a state of semi-consciousness in which he was able to have faith, to act and to remember. Only in such a condition could he bring to the emptiness of a soul, possessed by God's harshness and the thought of death, some sort of contact with his home, his farm, his money, with his wife and children. The colour began to return to his face, his lids to rise, disclosing dim eyes which began to shine under the hectic animation of liquor. His brow alone seemed untouched by the effects of drinking ; it rose above his excited gaze, like the symbol of a watcher keeping vigil above the delirious soul. Sitting at the taproom table, his brain whipped to action by the fumes of the liquor, a half-empty bottle before him, he would write in a clear hand to his lawyer about business affairs, making the most complicated financial reckonings with the greatest ease ; or he would report to his steward Blank, telling him a Criminal Commission would in all probability come to Treuen, and giving him orders as to how he must proceed in the conduct of the farm and superintend the questioning of the servants. Blank must also begin mowing the rye at once, then store it in Barn 4. But to his wife and children, Christian wrote never a word.

He would drink on and on. His heart beat swiftly, lightly ; his hands moved lightly, too, and never trembled.

His mouth, hanging open, displayed the shining teeth, thrusting their way through his tousled beard ; his eyes, no longer veiled by lowered lids, glittered wildly from his flushed face. But his brow remained pale, cool ; beads of sweat trickled down it, gathering at the dense eyebrows into little streams that coursed down his red face and disappeared beneath his collar. It seemed as though his brow wept to his mouth's delirious smile. Seizing a fresh sheet of paper, in a series of delicate, firm lines and dots, he drew up a plan of Treuen, showing house, yard, stables, barns, walls, pond, gardens, fields and pastures. Then, having drunk again, he set to designing new posters announcing Anna's disappearance and raising the reward by five thousand marks. At two o'clock, he was still in the taproom, alone. He rose, picked up his papers, walked woodenly to his room, threw himself on the bed without undressing. Falling asleep, he dreamed that the door opened and a dim light shone in ; in the half-darkness, a child stood, a pale-faced boy with long blonde curls, with a sad, puckered mouth and eyes downcast. Slowly the child came towards him through his dream. Overwhelmed, in a sudden rush of tenderness and pain, Christian recognised himself in the vision. Now the child stood quite still before him ; but, as Christian leaned forward, to look deeper and deeper into its face, suddenly the vision vanished . . . and, on the floor where the child had stood, lay but a heap of snow, whence rose a beam of white, streaming icy-cold towards the dreamer's face. Christian awoke, found his hands pressed against his cheeks ; looking around, he saw the room was dark and fathomless, the thick curtains drawn over the windows, yet the icy breath of the beam of light still edged the air. Christian sprang out of bed, tore open the door. In the hall, a lamp shone dimly ; its faint gleam and all the heat of the summer night poured over the threshold. The papers he had brought up from the taproom lay strewn about the floor and twinkled up at him. He picked them up, and, as he undressed, thrust them into his pockets for safe-keeping. Then he fell asleep again, never waking until noon.

From that day onward, he never was wholly sober, preferring the lucidity and understanding that alcohol brought him. Daily he attended the police hearings, urged the officials, interviewed detectives and plain clothes men, discussed the case with newspaper men, made journeys wherever a new trace of the child was reported. Never did he have the slightest notion of returning home. Blank, the steward, and Klara, his sister, would write; Christian rarely bothered to answer Blank's questions about farm matters or to issue any orders; and he never wrote to Klara or Martha.

The police investigations fell through: in spite of the closest investigation and severest questioning, no trace of a corpse was anywhere found. Meanwhile, of course, new reports poured in: the child had been seen here . . . there . . . and elsewhere again! Now the police reached the conclusion that the child had been carried off by Nikolaus, the missing member of the gipsy band, and either murdered subsequently or smuggled over the border.

But other circumstances intensified public interest in the case. At the request of the Department of Justice, the highest police and governmental officials co-operated; the Ministry of the Interior sent out special officers; the case was given widespread publicity in every government paper; a general search throughout the country was instigated, though later abandoned as impracticable. Instead, urgent requests for careful surveillance were sent to every district in the kingdom. Further, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs approached the other governments of the German Confederation and neighbouring countries and received not only promises of assistance but also immediate practical help. Everywhere, firm steps were at once taken to control the movements of vagabonds.

For the third time, Christian Scheffel raised the amount of the reward. If the child were found alive, the finder would now receive ten thousand marks over and above the original sum; if only the body were discovered, five thousand. Reports came daily from all quarters;

everywhere, the child had been sighted. Not a clue but was minutely investigated; Christian journeyed incessantly about the country to examine abandoned children who had been fondly supposed to resemble Anna. Eventually ninety persons were arrested and kept in custody for various periods.

But pursuit and investigation were without avail, and, in the end, despite the large sums of money expended upon it and the tireless zeal of the investigators, the case collapsed entirely. Then, in the middle of November, the missing Nikolaus was run to ground in a village in Hungary and delivered up to the authorities. He was a drink-sodden wreck of a man, with vermin crawling everywhere about him, and running sores on his neck. He stammered and stuttered but proved willing enough to reply to such questions as were put to him. When the whole matter had been clearly exposed and the evidence aired, he seemed to understand perfectly, but declared that he had never had a child with him, and, with a genial smile that belied his harsh voice, added: "Me as a father? Ha! There's nothing of the daddy in me!" He was also able to account with some accuracy for each of his stopping places and to produce credible alibis. When the Slicha gipsies were brought before him, they recognised him at once; the deaf and dumb dwarf threw his arms about Nikolaus's neck. They embraced and kissed one another effusively; in sign-language, and sneering frequently, they expressed their common contempt for the rest of the band.

On November 20th, the inquiry was abandoned. It had definitely established that during the period between July 1st and July 20th, a blonde child of four years old had been seen by witnesses with the Slicha gipsy band and that, on July 8th, between six o'clock and ten o'clock in the evening, it had disappeared.

The magistrate who had conducted the investigation with unfailing zeal had to take to his bed with a serious illness.

On November 23rd, Christian started home. The night

before, he sat up drinking ; he was quite drunk when he set out in the grey of the morning. At Erdenmiltel, Blank, the steward, met him in a sled. Not a word they spoke, as they drove over the snow and ice towards Treuen. Gradually, Christian's intoxication passed. He recognised the road and his own fields, brighter by far than they had ever before appeared. When they reached the yard, Christian hastened to his own room, locking the door behind him ; refusing to answer to knock or call. In the darkness he saw the room and furniture ; as he glanced up at the window, outside, he saw a whiteness. But it was not luminous ; rather, the cold even glow of snow. . . . He breathed deeply ; the last vapours of drunkenness rose and he recalled that glimpse of his child from the hurrying train, saw her once more swaying in the air across the dusk of the summer night, surrounded by torchlight and music.

He groped his way to the window, fell to his knees ; he closed his eyes, was at rest. A smile came to his lips.

The wild torture, the delirium, the mad obsessing dreams of the last weeks fell away from him. The peace of despair enveloped his soul and that serenity which is the serenity of death.

CHAPTER IV

During all this time, Martha had remained the prisoner of her mad delusions of future happiness. So helpless was she against the blows of fate, that, as this particular tragedy became ever more certain, she it was who lost more than all the others, since what she lost was herself. This irreparable disaster, turning what had been calm and joy into sorrow and agony, changed her utterly. She came to hate all her children, even the one she had lost. Anna, indeed, she hated to the very depths of her memory, as much as she had loved the child for the happiness it had given her. Her hatred went as far back as the day she had conceived it. With her sons she would have nothing whatever to do. It was Emma who saw that they went properly clothed, who fed them and attended to all their wants, who watched them at their work, warning them against overdoing things and bringing her tenderness as consolation for their orphaned hearts. But she could not protect them from the harsh, glittering eye of their mother, if, for instance, they came to table laughing, forgetful of the doom that hung over Treuen.

Night and day, Martha thought only of her husband. She stopped working. The very day he left she began to make preparations for his return. Earliest morning saw her already clad in light, gay frocks, slowly, tenderly combing her dark, thick shining tresses. Her figure, which had begun to take on matronly proportions, now grew slim again as a girl's. Martha was delighted to take in the waists of her dresses, tuck after tuck. Her hands grew soft and white ; as she sat dreaming at the window, she would rub them together ceaselessly, rejoicing in their smoothness. If anyone happened to call her at such moments, her eyes blazed ; the fury in their dark immobile depths terrified all who saw her. Then she would rise from

her seat, storm out of the house and disappear swiftly over the edge of the fields ; not until evening would she return, silently, unobserved. Emma, when she came searching for her, usually found her in her bed, half-asleep, her face buried in the pillows.

On Sundays, when Christian's sister Klara came to Treuen, Martha would seem to take a renewed interest in life ; the colour returned to her cheeks and she was seen to smile as of old. Save for the deep lines in her forehead and the minute wrinkles near her dark gleaming eyes, she might have passed for a young girl. On these Sundays, she would appear in the kitchen, talk to Emma, show an interest in the preparation of the meals and at the first sound of Klara's trap in the courtyard, she would run out, and, before Klara had alighted, Martha would throw herself in Klara's arms and hold her locked fast in a passionate embrace.

" Come," she would say in a hoarse, eager voice, " come to my room." Then she would drag Klara to her bedroom, make her sit on the chest by the window. Klara would talk, asking Martha question after question ; Martha never answered, but her whole being focused on Klara's face, her eyes feasting upon the features of Christian which were Klara's too, the earnest blue eyes, the grave, small mouth, the light hair. Klara's face and figure brought back to Martha's mind the happy days of yore. She would lavish her affection upon Klara ; avidly, she listened to Klara's words of consolation, accepting them gratefully. Like a child, she hung upon Klara, clung to her ; when Klara was ready to go, she would bury her face in Klara's breast, and, if neither tears nor words came, she would throw her arms about Klara's neck imploringly and kiss her intensely on the lips.

The days passed ; Christian's homecoming drew near, yet never a word did Martha hear from him. She could not bear the house ; everything was intolerable.

" Let me come to you," she begged Klara, coaxing her as a child might. " I shall wait for Christian there."

But Klara, torn between a sense of severe duty and her own emotional sympathies, refused.

"No," she answered, "you are a bad wife; you are neglecting everything. You seem to forget that these children belong to Christian, that this house is Christian's, too."

But she only repeated her plea whispering: "Take me with you."

Again, firmly, Klara refused, then suddenly left Martha to go and see Emma, Blank, the steward, and the children. She returned within an hour; but Martha had disappeared and could be found nowhere though Klara searched all through the house. But in the evening, as Klara was driving home, just as she emerged from the woods out on to the highway, she caught sight of Martha crouching on a white milestone in the twilight. Martha called to her softly. And, at last, Klara gave in and took Martha home with her.

Martha was happy there; Klara's house held many a bright memory for her. It was before that broad, stately entrance that Christian had lifted her out of the sled, picking her up like a feather and holding her high above him in his strong arms. A stranger, an orphan, a poor serving-girl; he had chosen her for his wife. How good everything had been! Now she would wait for him here again; again, he would come to take her, just as he had done before, to bring her to a house ordered and furnished for a bride. For Treuen now seemed to her unfamiliar, unknown. So it would be to a new home he would bring her back, a place whence sorrow had fled and where joy would be born again.

When the news of the trial reached them, and they were persuaded Anna had been murdered by the gipsies, Martha stood calmly over Klara; it was Klara who broke down and wept uncontrolled. For the first time in many long weeks she visualised her child distinctly. Anna's face and form swam into her vision; once more she caught the fragrance of the little naked body that she had bathed and dressed so

often. She trembled ; her heart leapt within her at the tender recollection, a flood of pain poured through her, roused her blood, quickened her inmost being. She smiled. " Don't take it like this," she said to Klara. " Please don't cry. When Christian comes back, we shall have another child."

Klara raised her head, stared up at her. Two mothers faced each other, the one fruitful, her body capable of bearing anew, her womb triumphant over death ; the other childless, her body withered in its blossoming, her heart heavy with love for the lost child and torn with pity and pain at its fate. Through a mist of tears, Klara saw Martha's smiling face ; it gleamed at her, reflected manifold, transfigured.

" Yes," she thought, " Martha will have another child. This mother can survive the disappearance and murder of Anna ; the joy of childbearing will be hers, but the sorrow of Anna she will leave for Christian to bear. And Christian, her brother, had known fulfilment, had been a father as tender and comforting as she, Klara, would have been, had life willed otherwise. For were not Christian and Klara branches of one tree ? Yet Klara must go lonely and desolate, her fruitfulness denied, while Christian's children must be born of a cold unfeeling mother, must be orphaned with both parents alive."

She turned away from Martha and ignored her. Martha noticed nothing. Now Martha lived without memory of the past or realisation of the present, lost in a dream of the future with its promise of new happiness. She would drift listlessly about the house, then suddenly vanish to wander for hours along the highway, to return only at night. She ate almost nothing ; her strength began to fail ; the thinner her figure grew and the hollower her face, the wider and brighter her dark black eyes glowed beneath the wrinkled forehead.

It was almost beyond Klara's power to manage her own house and her brother's as well. As the absent master wrote seldom and seemed often to forget the most urgent matters, everything at the farm was in confusion.

One Sunday in harvest time, Blank, the steward, had come to Klara with the two boys ; after a long, embarrassed silence, finally he told her how the harvesters had had to go unpaid the day before, because no money had come in and the master had sent none. Appalled, Klara hastened to her husband, who lent her the money on Martha's signature, though not without shaking his head ominously, disparaging. The steward belonged to Christian heart and soul ; he did not miss the contemptuous smile on the baron's pudgy face. The next week, once more Christian failed to send funds. But this time, Blank called the harvesters and farm-hands together after work and addressed them. He explained to them that the cattle-dealers, grain-merchants and millers all owed the master great sums of money but were trying to profit by the family's misfortune and had not paid a pfennig during six terrible weeks. Christian's mind, he said, was so distraught with anxiety over his child that he had forgotten to send their wages ; therefore the only money on the farm was what had come in from the weekly market. This sum was less than usual because of harvest ; but what there was, he would divide among them. Above all, he urged them to keep quiet about the state of affairs at Treuen and assured them that their money was as safe with Christian Scheffel as in the State Bank. He also promised that they would be reimbursed and with interest. They listened quietly, without uttering a word of approbation or refusal. When Blank had finished, they took the coins he distributed and went to table in silence. During the meal, a young hand asked :

" Won't we have a harvest festival, either ? "

" Anyone who doesn't like it, can go," the steward said curtly. They finished the meal in silence.

It was a good harvest ; the grain hung heavy on the golden stalks. The reaping began joyously despite the heat. The younger hands, especially, pressed eagerly from the lighter work in the stables and the house to the harder toil in the fields. Mowing began before sunrise ; later in the day the heat grew too oppressive. The mowers set out in

the morning twilight, still with silence and sleep ; rhythmically the scythes rose and fell, the whirr of the swinging blades echoing across the still air at each downward sweep, followed by the whisper of falling grain. Then someone would strike up the first song, and, as the rest took it up, the curving knives would swing high and low, ever swifter, biting into the rich grain that seemed still inert in the sheltering sleep of the night. The workers were glad to escape for a while from the ill-starred house ; they laughed and jested as they worked ; and, when the heat of the sun grew unendurable, they strolled away for a moment's rest into the nearby forest, threw themselves down on the moss and lay drowsing to the murmur of distant, unseen brooks.

Fritz toiled with prodigious energy from earliest morning till late at night. He opened the stalls and cleaned them, looked after the cattle, carried the great pans to the cellar at milking time, and, all day long, brought water from the well into the kitchen. He took food to the workers in the fields, bound sheaves, and watered the garden, which, but for his care, would long ago have withered in the fierce heat of the sun. He kept everything in order : nothing eluded his watchful eye. Never before had he proved so eager, so quick and so apt. Wherever they needed him, he was already at hand, and, the task done, he was already gone. He felt calm, in good humour. When, late in the evening, by the well, he washed and groomed the large plough horses, the feverish restless power would leave his hands and arms ; his movements would become slower. He would bring the brush gently over the animals' skins ; and, as he led them to the stable, he would rest his left hand on the neck of the one nearest him, stroking and petting it as he trudged wearily beside it. And, walking, he would break into song in his fine, clear treble. The moment he reached his bed, he would quickly fall asleep, utterly exhausted.

Now, far as the eye could reach, the rows of sheaves stood in the fields ready to be brought in.

Four teams, two of oxen, two of horses, worked the whole

day long. Fritz drove the horses. He harnessed them, drove the carts out over the fields and, despite the added trouble, he would unhitch them while the carts were being loaded and take them to the shadowy edge of the woods, out of the burning sun. He helped with the loading, too, and was the first to return, his load towering high above the rest. The steward clapped him heartily upon the shoulder :

" Come on, boy, you and I first, and God bless us ! "

And he swung himself up beside Fritz on the box, where they sat bending forward under the overhanging sheaves. With a soft sharp click of the tongue, Fritz gathered the reins in his hands. The heavy muscles of the horses stiffened to his command, their hides wrinkled about their vast haunches, at a short pull of the reins, the heavily loaded cart began to move forward very slowly, step by step, out of the field, towards the track that ran between the meadows ; from there it went swaying along past the well and at last over the flagged pavement of the yard to a stop. The horses stood panting, pawing the stones with their great hoofs, while Fritz remained imperturbable, reins in hand. But Blank had dismounted and stood mopping the sweat from his brow. A hundred paces ahead lay Barn 4. The huge doors were flung open ; within it was darker than night. Fritz measured the entrance with his eye, deciding just how he would drive the horses and cart through.

" All right, here goes ! " the steward cried, going back to push all his weight against the back wheel, to help the cart forward.

But Fritz raised his whip and brought it whistling down on the horses' backs. Amid a great clatter of hoofs, the cart jerked into motion. With its huge burden, it raced down the path, thundering over the threshold of the barn. An inch from the door, Fritz jumped down off the box and with all his strength wrenched at the reins ; then slowly, the cart rolled into the barn. The horses came to a halt, their jaws frothing, their heads held very stiffly in the sudden darkness. Their hoofs beat with a muffled thud on the straw-covered floor.

It suddenly seemed as though all living sounds had been stifled abruptly in the darkness ; the sound of his own voice came to Fritz as from the depths of the grave. It was dark ; no sign of the brilliant summer sunlight here, but a dead sultry air and an odour of must, a sense of death and a terrible silence. Fritz felt a cold sweat break out all over his body. He did not move ; but his eyes darted about the barn.

Blank, who had followed the cart, now came into the barn. At once the mood of the place caught him too :

" It's a hellish place, this, and no mistake," he said, trying to laugh.

" I'd better rub the horses down," Fritz answered.

Painfully, wearily, he began to unharness them, led them out. He did not help to unload the sheaves but drove all the carts and wagons into the barn, proud of his skill. One after another he brought them in, watching the huge empty barn being gradually filled with grain. He recalled nothing. Not once did he turn his head towards the corner, now hidden under a mountain of sheaves, except that, as he was helping to store the last sheaves in a mow that reached almost to the roof, he did glance about for the nest which he remembered had been there, fearing that the birds might suffocate. But it was August and the nest was bare.

The barn was full ; they closed it ; it took four men to swing the huge doors on their rusty hinges. Two by two, they seized the great wings and hurled themselves forward ; twice they attacked the doors before they set the edges firmly together, shot the massive iron bolt across them and sealed it with a padlock.

Everyone stood by, breathless. Fritz laughed :

" That was the toughest job of all," he said.

The steward announced the latest news about the gipsies, telling them that no corpse had been found after all. Everyone listened in silence. Only Fritz murmured sadly :

" Oh, she'll never be found ! They've hidden her away all right ! "

No one paid any attention to him ; slowly they all passed into the yard. Fritz went to look for his mother. Emma was in the dairy, skimming the milk for butter ; she held the heavy jar between her knees ; Fritz took it from her.

" What are you doing here ? " she asked him.

" It's cool," he answered softly. Then : " There was no money again to-day," he added.

" You've no need of money," his mother said sternly.

" I mean for you," he said.

" I've no need of it either," she replied gruffly ; but she was touched, and, as they went out, she put her arm round him. He nestled eagerly into her embrace, happy and at peace.

The work went on : it brought him joy and contentment each day, and, when it was over, a deep, dreamless sleep. His mother's tenderness brought a sweetness to his hours of rest. On Sunday afternoons, they sat in the little garden arbour, where he sang to her out of the hymn book ; sometimes too, she would teach him other songs, love songs and others that she had known in her youth. She never tired of listening to his warm, pure voice.

The reaping was scarcely done with when the police officials reappeared and resumed their investigations. The steward, standing at the door of Barn 4, which had been open at the time of the tragedy and which was now filled and closed, reported that it had been thoroughly searched at that time. It was moreover obvious that no misfortune could have overtaken the child there, for the barn, when they had searched it, was completely empty and its floor perfectly level. Neither Güse, the roofmaker, nor the boy Fritz Schütt, who had helped him repair the thatch, had noticed anything unusual. This satisfied the Inspector ; he proceeded to question the servants of house and farm. Answer followed question without pause or equivocation ; every face, every conscience proved clear as day. Fritz's answers displayed neither confusion nor hesitation.

" You were the last to see Anna Scheffel ? " the Inspector asked.

" Yes, down by the pond."

" What were you doing there ? "

" Cutting reeds."

" What did you say to Anna Scheffel ? "

" Nothing. She wanted to see a bird's nest but I didn't know where to find one."

" But she went up with you from the pond to the yard ? "

" I don't know if she did—I was carrying a heavy load."

" Where did you go then ? "

" Into the barn to put down the reeds I'd carried up."

" And you saw nobody ? "

" Nobody ! "

" What did you do after that ? "

" I went to vespers. I was very thirsty from carrying all those reeds."

" But you said before that you saw a beggar and chased him out of the yard. Now you say you didn't see anyone."

" Yes, I did see the beggar and I did chase him away. I thought you meant had I seen Anna Scheffel ? I didn't see her. I wasn't trying to lie."

With a smile, the Inspector dismissed him.

Gradually the crops were all gathered in. There had been a rich yield of grain ; the fruit was good also, but the vegetables and potatoes were injured by the persistent heat and drought. Some of the stock had suffered too : four litters of pigs and a flock of sheep had fallen ill after drinking stagnant water. The steward, still without instructions from his master, went to town, determined to collect the money owed to Treuen. There he learned that almost all save a few of the minor debts had already been paid to the notary, and that these sums had been forwarded on to Christian. Taking counsel with Emma he decided that he must increase the weekly market-produce. As the milk products had fallen away and the vegetables run low, he sent great quantities of fruit away, which ordinarily would have been stored for the winter, and much poultry. From the sale of these, he was able to cover the wages and the most pressing

expenses for repairs and replacements of wagons and farming implements.

At the end of September, the fine weather broke ; the rains began. When the dry earth had been soaked through, they fertilised it with fresh manure and sowed the winter crop ; in Barn 9 they began to thresh last year's wheat. When the potato crop had been gathered, it was time to cut the wood, for October was passing, and by November the wood must all be in. Once a week Blank took the hands with him and, borrowing the master's three rifles, they went out hunting. Blank, Andreas, the fisherman, and one of the old farm-hands did the shooting, while the others beat up the quarry, ran it towards the guns, bore down on the trail like hounds and made their kill with clubs. Their hunting made up for the harvest-festival which they had had to forgo ; and many who had secretly resolved to leave ill-starred Treuen, now decided to stay. The game consisted of wild fowl, hares and once, even, a stag ; their banquets were fittingly celebrated ; they fell to with gusto amid a tumult of gaiety. Then the cold came soon, the snow fell and the master returned.

The steward informed Klara of Christian's return ; when Martha heard the news, she was panic-stricken. Instantly she awoke from her illusion. Just as a cloud first looms on the horizon, ominous and big with hail, then, driven by the storm, overshadows day and suddenly bursts upon the earth beneath, spreading destruction in its wake, so at present an irremediable despair scattered her rapturous spell. Now the thought of the man whom she had craved so long, filled her mind with horror. She conjured up his image ; saw his white, tousled hair, his stony face with its hooded eyes ; she felt his icy despair, felt his heart turning from her to give itself utterly to his mystic grief, recoiled from his hand as he thrust her from him. Now she saw Treuen again in its true light, a place that joy had abandoned, a place housing but a child's empty bed. She ached with the bitterness of the nights to come, when, lying in her lonely bed, she had but to count hour after mortal hour

her longing choking her, sorrow her companion by day and grief her bedfellow by night.

She sank to the floor. For the first time since the tragedy, she wept, screamed, writhed on the ground, sobbing. She mustered all her will-power, fought with all her strength against going back with Klara to Treuen.

Klara looked at her in silence.

" She is a stranger," she said to herself, " she brought him misfortune."

She ordered her carriage and drove to Treuen alone. She arrived at nine o'clock ; everything was already in darkness. Emma answered her knock : the master had come home, she told her, but he had made straight for the parlour and locked himself in there. Klara knocked at the door and called to him ; but he took no notice. Then she went upstairs and made ready to sleep in Martha's bed.

The candlelight fell on the three forsaken beds : Christian's, Martha's and Anna's at their feet. Suddenly she felt stunned ; she could not grasp the import of the tragedy ; it eluded her. Her sadness froze within her, her condemnation did not rise to her lips, the tears gathering in her eyes were unshed. She held her hands clasped before her, but she was beyond prayer.

" What is the use of praying ? " she thought. " Perhaps the child is not dead ; but everything is much worse than ever."

She could not bring herself to sleep ; she sat up all night on the chest by the window.

In the morning, everyone met at breakfast in the kitchen. The master came in quickly ; brother and sister shook hands.

He was terribly changed. His face, once so clear, was now bloated ; his features, once so open, seemed tragically blurred now. He was pale as a ghost save for a yellowish blotch here and there. His beard and moustache were long and ragged ; his lips sagged in a horrible, set smile, or, at times, moved as if in speech, though no sound came. His head drooped over his chest ; it was as though the weight of

his shoulders bore him down. His hands when at rest trembled slightly ; he walked slowly but with a strange lightness. For the most part, he held his eyes downcast ; when he drew back his heavy lids, they revealed a dull, veiled gaze, fixed upon some far point in space. Only his brow still shone clear and high under his bleached untidy hair.

He said nothing ; his silence commanded a like silence. A great peace came from him.

Karl and Gustav came in. Both had grown in his absence ; now the younger was only an inch shorter than the other. They closely resembled their father in figure ; but their small delicate heads, their dark hair and eyes, recalled their mother. They slunk forward, ill at ease, afraid to look their father in the eye. But Christian seized them by the shoulders and pressed them close against him for a moment. Then he shook hands with Emma, who sobbed aloud, and nodded a greeting to the others. The meal began.

Klara sat in Martha's place. Christian said nothing. Everyone made haste to be done ; soon the kitchen was empty again. Then Klara whispered :

" Martha is at our house, Christian. I think she is ill. She has been acting very strangely ; she doesn't want to come home."

" Let her be," he said slowly. His voice was soft too. " It is all right."

" What about the house and the children ? "

" The children are to go away too."

" No, Christian, don't do that."

" Yes, I shall. But they can come back if they want to."

There was a long pause. Then Klara said :

" What about Anna ? "

For answer Christian raised his hand, held it trembling in the air for a moment, then let it fall heavily upon the table.

Klara looked at him. His strangely altered, harassed face forbade further question. Again, there was a long pause. Then :

" You have no money in the house," she resumed.

" Plenty of money. I can always sell out."

" Has it come to that ? "

" Probably."

He raised his eyes, looked long at his sister's bright hair.

" What sort of people were our parents ? " he asked suddenly.

" You know very well," Klara answered in surprise, " father was always well, always working."

" And mother ? "

" Mother used to cry sometimes. And before you came, she used to pray a great deal."

He looked at her again intently ; when he spoke his voice was almost affectionate.

" We were happy as children, weren't we ? "

Klara nodded.

" Well, it's nearly over now. I hope so."

" You must think of the children."

" For better or for worse, we shall always be thought of," he said.

" Would you like me to stay here with you ? " she asked quickly.

" No, go home," Christian answered. " You are better off there than here."

Then he left her where she stood and returned to the parlour.

Klara obeyed reluctantly, for the home of her beloved brother, in the hour of calamity and destruction, meant more to her than the home of her marriage where she had lived sheltered alike from extremes of good and evil fortune.

She found Martha sitting in the kitchen by the stove, her hands folded under her apron.

" Are you as cold as all that ? " she asked.

" I'm afraid."

" Come into the parlour. You must not sit here among the servants."

" I used to be a servant, myself," Martha answered.

" You are not a servant any longer. You are a woman

with a husband and children. Won't you go back to your boys now ? "

" I had no father either," Martha said. " Why doesn't Christian come to me ? I'm still young enough : thirty-six is no age. How old are you, Klara ? "

" Forty-eight ! "

" Oh, I pity you . . ."

" Won't you try and work a little ? "

" No. How is Christian ? Still as old-looking ? "

" He looks very ill. You must go home and look after him."

" He isn't ill. But I *am* ; and if I go back to that house, I shall die, I feel it. And I am too young for that ; I don't want to die yet, Klara ! We must move to another house. You'll help us, won't you ? Then we can begin our lives all over again. I'll tell him so when he comes. Will he be here soon ? "

" You know he is in great trouble," Klara answered.

But Martha rose silently and followed her into the living-room. Thenceforward she began to work again and nothing could prevent her from finishing the meanest tasks she put her hand to.

" I don't mind being a servant again," she would say. " That's all I was in town when Christian came for me. If only I need not die ! "

And every day she would ask if Christian were coming.

" I have no word of him," Klara would answer.

Often, in the early November twilight, she would run out of the house, her hands under her apron ; she never returned before nightfall, when she crept, numb and frozen, into bed. But nothing could persuade her to drive to Treuen with Klara, even for an hour.

" That is no place to live in any more," she would say. " Christian must leave it too, he must come to me."

Christian, for his part, never asked for news of her. When Klara mentioned her, he would say, " She is better off with you."

Little by little, Klara moved all Martha's dresses, linen

and shoes to her house. In the chest where Martha kept all her treasures, nothing remained save her heavy black silk wedding-dress and her bridal veil carefully folded on it. No one occupied the bedroom now. Christian lived entirely in the parlour, leaving it only for meals. He had almost ceased to speak. He listened without comment to the steward's reports, answered the most urgent questions as briefly as possible. He wrote a great deal. As the past months had seriously drained his cash resources and disorganised the farm, he did much business now with cattle-dealers, selling his stock regardless of what he had always considered the right number to retain for breeding, and indifferent to the fact that it was a bad time to sell, since the good crops had brought down the price of meat.

But he looked forward to his death with longing and was determined his sons should receive their inheritance in cash. He meant to send them away in the spring, either to school in the town, or to learn their trade as farmers in some other place, far away in the south. He never touched liquor now, but his flaccid, puffy face did not fill out again as his strength returned.

Winter came, splendid as autumn had been. Day and night the white fields shone with snow, the ponds glittered with crystal ice. A three-day November storm had swept the trees bare and covered the sky with clouds ; but now everything was still and clear. In the red winter sunlight, the frosty air moved shimmering over the fields like a veil of dull gold edged with the soft, deep blue of the horizon. The new moon brought clouds and fresh snow. Peace lay upon the world, and it was mourning and festival, life and death. The tumult of life with its breeding and bearing and growing was hushed ; death, with the voice of silence, uttered its promise of deliverance through the night.

Every night Christian walked out into the winter darkness where the black sky loomed over him and the earth, the grave, shone white about his feet. In that darkness the love of his heart, the toil of his hands, life and happiness faded like a mist ; only the certainty of death shed its faint

radiance on him. Between the two lay tragedy and God, with veiled countenance. The peace of despair filled him ; he hoped he had reached the end, that all he need do now was to wait for the slow outpouring of his body's strength through the weary days. Then, he prayed, he might at last behold the face of the Almighty and understand His word and will, His wisdom and the infinite loving kindness of His ways. He saw his child as an angel now. Neither dead nor living, she moved between heaven and earth and led him along his difficult path.

Yet the end was farther off than ever. Early in December, Christian met his wife as he was walking out one evening, at about nine o'clock, across the fields towards the forest. Her shadowy figure moved towards him unsteadily, hastily, over the white land. They could not see each other with their eyes in the moonless night, but they felt each other's presence, they were driven along the same ways. Without a word, Martha collapsed in his arms. He carried her home.

She was very ill, having fled from her bed at Klara's, half delirious with fever and barely clothed, obeying the imperious power that drove her along the homeward road she dreaded. Christian carried her upstairs into the cold, deserted bedroom and laid her on her bed. He woke Emma, who lit the fire, then undressed her mistress's gaunt emaciated form, kissing her hands as she did so, swiftly, secretly. She heated water, washed Martha's feet, muddy and sore, wrapped heavy woollen blankets around the pitiful body, shivering with ague, and gave her hot milk and honey. Martha smiled. In the candlelight, her feverish face looked like that of a child. Her husband sat at her bedside ; her hand clung to his. In her delirium, she thought she lay in labour pains.

" You need not go yet," she whispered, pressing his hand against her breast. " The pain has gone no lower than here. You can stay with me until to-night, I know, I can tell. You waited a long time, but I did take you in my arms ; always, I took you in my arms, and we had sons. But this

time you shall have a daughter ; we shall be happier than we have ever been before. You shall have a fair daughter from your dark wife ; we shall call her Anna. She will urge through you and through me and then out of me . . . out. . . . But we need not be sorry, for she is our daughter. We shall have no more children after her ; that will be all the happiness we need. So long as you stay by me, everything is right. You must not leave me ; the pains are coming now. But the child, our daughter . . ."

She moaned, uttered low, sharp cries, writhed on the bed as though in intolerable pain, calling constantly for her husband and addressing the newborn child tenderly, in broken words. . . .

Christian sat beside her, holding her hand. Towards six o'clock in the morning, the candle burned out ; a faint gleam came through the window, snow was falling. Christian could hear the lowing of cattle and, in the kitchen, the noises of the early morning work. Day broke slowly. Suddenly the clatter of hoofs filled the yard ; a moment later Emma entered timorously with a telegram. Martha had at last fallen into the deep sleep of exhaustion. Christian freed his hand very gently, and read the message :

ANNA SCHEFFEL FOUND. COMMUNICATE IMMEDIATELY RÖDER, GERMAN TEACHER, KRASNAN, RUSSIAN POLAND.

He turned and looked at his wife ; the message lay heavy upon him. Her face was rosy in sleep, a smile hovered about her lips. One shoulder and the curve of her breast lay bare ; Christian sat gazing at her bosom that rose and fell as she breathed. Suddenly a great horror of himself came over him ; he repented for his chill bitterness of heart. In the happy days of the past, he had lived gladly with others, sharing his joy with all who came in contact with him ; but since evil had befallen him, he had forsaken them all too willingly, to live his pain within himself. He would never have another child ; but for the sake of his wife and her dream of new birth, he would set out once more on

the search and seek to conquer his own despair. He drew the blanket gently over her ; she did not stir.

He left the room, the horses were harnessed and he drove into the little town. His father's heart beat anew ; he decided to take his eldest son with him on the journey. He sent the doctor back in the carriage to his wife and set about his preparations at once.

His passports would be ready on the morrow ; with the help of the postmaster, he made out his itinerary from official maps and time-tables. Within two days, he could reach the last railway-station ; thence, it was but a day's journey over the border. From there, he was told, a great post road made a wide détour about a range of mountains and led to the little Russian town which was his destination. In all, therefore, it was a journey of four or five days, if all went well ; in the postmaster's opinion it should cost about sixty thalers. Christian decided to leave two days later ; the police officials offered to send word before him so that he might count on help everywhere along the way.

Christian spent the night in town. As his ready cash was almost exhausted, he had to be astir on the morrow in order to replenish his exchequer from the proceeds of that year's harvest. Late that evening he was still shopping, the merchants opening, especially for him, shops that were closed to the public. As he bought a pair of high boots, a jacket and an embroidered carpet-bag, for his son, choosing them with great care, he recaptured something of his old pleasure in doing things for others.

He returned to Treuen late the following night, woke Emma and asked after his wife. Martha was asleep ; the doctor had prescribed simply rest and strengthening nourishment. Emma promised to provide food for the journey and to pack his bag as usual. She at once lit a fire, kneaded special dough to bake a cake that would remain fresh and moist for a long time. Out of a different dough, she made two loaves of bread. While the oven was warming, she went with her lantern to the hen-coop, seized two of the sleeping birds, killing them then and there, to save the

household being awakened by their cries. She fried them ; baked the bread and cake, salted some butter and wrapped a ham in fresh linen. By four o'clock, everything was ready. Seeing a light in the master's room, she went to fetch his bag. Christian had been working hard ; his face was flushed with his efforts. He looked at her kindly :

" God bless you and reward you, Emma ! " he said, " I have neglected you all, I have not looked after you."

" Oh, God grant she is in heaven ! " Emma answered, thinking of the child in her confusion at Christian's words.

" Look after my wife," he said. " Tell her that good news came and that I went away for her sake. In an hour's time wake Blank and tell him to come to me at once. Keep well." He took her hand, gripped it. And : " Thanks ! " he added.

Emma went away, sobbing with joy and emotion, unable to speak ; she would gladly have given her life for her master.

One by one, the household awoke. Fritz was already in the stables ; the sleigh had already been brought out when the steward came out of the parlour with his master, and everyone crowded into the kitchen, partly out of curiosity, partly because the kitchen was so warm, so fragrant after Emma's baking. A sort of faint gaiety hung in the air. Among them stood the young son, his eyes shining, joy and surprise glowing on his face usually so shy and pensive. Everybody admired his fine new things, his warm hunting jacket with its horn buttons, his high boots that clattered with every step he took, his handsome travelling bag. Then Christian entered, ready for the journey. Even he seemed more animated ; his face wore a look of expectancy, he held his shoulders squared, stood looking down at his son. Karl looked back at him, all excitement, but dared not approach.

" Well, my boy," he asked, " sure you're not afraid ? "

But the boy, moved beyond words, could only shake his head. Everyone laughed. They sat down to their meal with a sense of well-being ; outside a clear, beautiful December morning dawned. Many a young fellow there would have

liked to go with them. It grew lighter ; presently the master rose and went out into the yard. The horses were harnessed, the baggage loaded on to the sleigh. The steward was to drive with them as far as town where he was to be officially granted power of attorney for Christian and full authority at Treuen. The excitement grew general ; soon the yard was filled with noise. Fritz cracked his whip. Karl took his place in the sleigh. But Christian lingered a moment ; he was thinking that he had not bid his wife farewell. He looked up at her window ; everything there was still. Then he jumped quickly into the sleigh and sat down beside his son. Emma ran up and, climbing on to the runners, drew the boy's head towards her so violently that she sent his cap flying down into the snow, while she covered his face with tears and kisses. Then, one by one, the others came and shook hands with the father and son.

Karl was filled with pride. Eventually Blank joined them and the sleigh passed swiftly out of the yard.

At that moment, a terrible cry rang through the house. Emma, rushing upstairs, found her mistress on the floor, screaming, beating the planks with her hands. She had been awakened by the noise in the yard, and, looking through the window in the dim morning light, she had recognised her husband and son in the departing sleigh. She had to be taken back to bed by force. Emma never left her side, day and night. Over and over, she gave her the message that Christian had left for her ; yet Martha never once gave the slightest sign that she understood. She was a bad patient, gave Emma infinite trouble. She would pour away the food Emma had prepared so carefully ; she would refuse to follow the slightest suggestion. But the loyal servant watched tirelessly over her, urged her, with such gentle insistence and such patience, to eat, to sleep and to save her strength, that, after a few weeks, the invalid was up and about again.

CHAPTER V

When they reached town, Christian and Karl made for the grain-merchant's, the boy striding clumsily beside his father, uncomfortable in his new boots. At the grain-merchant's, they found the money waiting for them. Christian divided it into three parts : one for Blank, to cover such emergencies as might arise at Treuen ; one for himself, and one for the boy. He bought two small leather purses ; he and Karl put the money in these and kept them tied about their necks.

" So long as we stay together," he said, " you will have no cause to touch yours ; but should some accident separate us or should something happen to me, never mind me—take care of yourself. Keep your money close, my boy ; it is the most necessary thing in the world."

Still haunted by the thought of death, Christian said again :

" If anything happens to me, take the papers out of my wallet ; they are all the police identification necessary for burial in a foreign country. And have me buried wherever I may happen to die. Then, after, go back to the police ; they will see that you reach home safely again."

Karl nodded, smiling. The train, moving so fast and bearing him he knew not whither, delighted him.

" We're sure to find sister again," he whispered.

" Perhaps ! " Christian said.

They travelled till midnight, then spent a few hours in a station. With the first light of dawn, they continued their way eastward. The train was very full, at every station passengers alighted and others entered ; it seemed to Karl that he could never tire of watching all these strange people and listening to their talk. But the father sat motionless, his eyes lowered, his hands, broad and still, upon his knees.

In the afternoon, they reached a junction and changed trains. Now there was a strange air about everything. Two men sat opposite them, wearing long black coats ; their hair too was very black and keen black eyes flashed in their pale faces. Karl began to feel afraid of them ; he dared hardly eat the food his father offered him.

" Why do those people talk so strangely ? I can't understand them," he whispered.

" We are travelling in a foreign country," Christian answered, " everyone speaks like that here."

" Why don't people speak the same everywhere ? I can't understand them and they won't be able to understand me," the child complained.

" There is no answer for many things in this world," Christian said, stroking the boy's dark hair.

Calmed by this caress, Karl fell asleep ; his father found it hard to wake him when they reached the last station before the border. Confused, bewildered, Karl strode through the huge station where the enormous black trains stood quietly waiting on their tracks, where crowds of people ran about shouting and bustling, where lights blazed everywhere, even though it was midnight. They pushed their way towards the street among the crowd. Suddenly Karl gave a loud cry ; everyone turned to look at him. In the lobby of the station, he had discovered his sister's picture on a poster, hanging beside a large railway map.

" There's sister, there she is," he shouted, rushing towards it. " There she is ! It's she ! Father ! " he stammered, trembling with excitement, with tears of happiness in his eyes. As he recalled his sister, with whom all his happy childhood was so closely bound up, a great joy filled his heart and with it his childish faith returned ; he had implicit confidence in the future, now that he had seen her picture, glimpsed her face in this great, strange place in a country he had never seen before.

" Look, it's Anna," he repeated, as his father joined him and both gazed at the little face that smiled up at them.

Christian's gaze clung to the picture, following every line of Anna's features, without question, without grief or hope, his heart at peace. An illusion gripped him : the picture seemed to come to life ; he saw Anna's lids move, caught a new, altered glance in her eye ; the smile on her little mouth seemed to contract tearfully and the tiny hand, once raised in childish admonition, now seemed to hold a threat. Christian stepped back. What if the child were alive ? Where was his heart ? What had become of his love for her ? He had found a personal salvation in the loneliness of his desire for death, but around him, everywhere, those whom his love had cherished and brought into being, had found decay, nothingness. . . . Shame and melancholy possessed him. He touched his son gently on the shoulder.

" Come," he said. " We will go and find your sister."

They went into the town. Once more, fear seized him when he caught sight of the tall houses and long stone streets, covered with grey mud, with never a sign of white, shining snow. They put up at a simple hotel. While the son slept through the morning, the father wandered through the streets until he found the Town Hall. Here he found he was expected ; documents, written in two languages, explained his errand in full ; thus he would have no difficulty in making himself understood, even without the help of an interpreter. The regular service was to leave at once, but as Christian could not deny Karl his sorely-needed rest, he ordered a special carriage for that afternoon, so they might still reach the frontier before night. Then he went back to the hotel, ordered a good meal for both of them, and, when it was ready, awakened his son. An hour later, a carriage came for them ; it drove through the bustling streets till they reached the edge of the city, where the high road stretched endlessly to the horizon under the shining snow. There a fine, large sleigh stood waiting for them. The bells on the harness of the team rang gaily ; the sleigh was piled with rugs and furs. Lightly, swiftly, they drove over the plains, so smooth that the bells scarcely made a sound. But presently they turned into a dense tall

forest, deep in snow, and the ringing grew louder. Soon, however, they came out again on the open road and the bells rang very softly. Now the strong cold winter air rushed past them.

" The clouds are threatening ! " the boy said, pointing to the horizon.

" No, that is a mountain range," Christian told him.

The child, who had grown up in the unbroken flat countryside of Treuen and had never yet seen a mountain, was awed.

" Shall we go right into the mountains ? " he whispered.

" Yes."

" Is that where sister is ? "

" No. Anna is in a town on the other side of the mountains."

Since he had seen her picture again, Karl had thought of her continuously ; he could not understand how she had strayed so far from home to a town behind the mountain range.

A swift six-hour journey brought them to the frontier. They showed their papers and were given quarters for the night. In broken German, the officials promised them that early next morning a sleigh would be ready to take them to the next station, whence the regular service would bear them to the end of their journey. But by eleven o'clock next day, there was still no sign of a sleigh. After much inquiry, Christian managed to make out that the station could not be more than two hours away, so they took up their baggage, prepared to go there on foot. But before they had gone far they were forced to turn back, for the road was buried under deep snow and there was neither track nor sign to guide them. After much bargaining with the host, they were at last able to obtain a sleigh for after lunch. A little grey horse drew it ; the driver was a small undergrown fellow, scarcely more than a boy, wrapped in such a huge fur coat that it hid his feet, even when he walked. He joined them at the travellers' table and, with a friendly laugh, drank their healths in a glass of brandy

that the hostess had set down beside him. Having drunk four glasses, he began to talk to her ; from the sympathetic glances he cast in their direction, Christian and Karl understood that she was telling him their story. The young fellow's little grey eyes were filled with tears ; suddenly he sprang up, rushed at Christian, embraced first him, and then Karl, talking away to them all the time in the most affectionate tones, though they could not understand a word he said. He shouted something at the hostess ; she hastened to him with still another glass of brandy, which he gulped down. Then he ran to his sleigh in the courtyard. As the two travellers were about to hasten after him, the hostess sharply demanded payment for the brandy. When Christian gave it to her, she took the money in one hand and, with the other, made the sign of the cross.

As they entered the sleigh, Karl was much astonished to see it had no driver's seat, and that the driver, reins in hand, was standing by the horse.

" Does he run alongside ? " the child asked.

But Christian did not know. When the baggage had been buckled on, the driver paid out the reins to their full length and cracked his whip ; the horse began to move, the sleigh rode forward, but the driver stayed behind. He seemed to have disappeared. Karl turned around ; there the fellow stood, close behind him in the middle of the road high above, laughing. Karl thought he must be a magician. But Christian explained the wonder.

" He's standing on the runners," he told him. The child was filled with admiration ; he could hardly wait to be home again and try the feat himself. Gradually, the little horse quickened his quiet trot to a gallop ; soon they were flying over the white plain, leaving but a faint track upon its vast expanse. It was four o'clock ; evening was already setting in. It was a strange journey. The young driver held the reins slack and hardly seemed to guide the horse at all. He sang continuously in a soft voice. They flew on through the gathering darkness without ever seeing anything—no village, no tree, no milestone, not even an animal, anywhere.

They could hear no sound above the heavy breathing of the horse, whose hoof-falls were quite inaudible in the soft, deep snow, save the driver's endless humming. It grew ever colder ; soon their limbs were quite numb. The boy bit his lips hard to hide the pain, but Christian seemed unaware of the cold—he had long since ceased to notice pain or any other physical sensation. The sky was starless, apparently covered with clouds. Suddenly the sleigh made a sharp turn and a deeper darkness appeared against the darkness to their left ; gradually the mass of a mountain rose before them. Fallen branches crackled under their sleigh. The cry of a bird rent the shadows ; then they heard the soft murmur of water under thin ice, they rattled over a wooden bridge, on and on, never slackening their pace. The sleigh turned again, sank deep in snow, and slowly, painfully now, they were following a narrow track through a forest. The low branches of invisible pines brushed against them, flung down their heavy burden of snow upon them. Behind, in total obscurity, the driver never stopped singing. The little horse panted on. All at once the whip cracked above their heads, the sleigh took so sharp a curve that the travellers were very nearly thrown out, and hardly had they recovered from their bewilderment when they found themselves out in the open again. Their sleigh sped on, the gloom lifted, and suddenly they had stopped.

They found themselves on a hillside, a city at their feet. The boy cried out with delight ; and even the father smiled, the awkward, unready smile of one whom joy has taken unawares. They had not noticed that they were travelling up-hill ; they had never before stood on a height and seen a landscape spread out beneath them as they saw this one now, vanishing deeper and deeper into the distant valley cut by a wide river covered with thin, twinkling ice. Gradually their wondering eyes discerned dark bridges that flung their graceful arcs over the bright river ; there were lights on the bridges and rows of lights along the streets ; lights shone in all the houses too in the immense city lying at their feet. The sky was red with the reflection of

many lamps. To Christian and Karl it seemed as though light and colour streamed upward here from earth to sky, whereas at home it was the sky poured light and colour downwards upon the earth, morning and night. Countless spires rose darkly into the glowing heavens against which great cupolas swung, each like a separate sky. Now they caught the sound of the city, a dull, continuous murmur, but presently there was a ringing of bells from the innumerable towers, first softly, then swelling to such power and beauty that they overflowed the air and only the heart could hold their wondrous music. Christian trembled as he heard them.

" I will do everything in my power," he said to himself, " I will pray that my child may be still alive."

The young driver had been waiting for the vesper bells. He knelt down in the snow where he stood, crossed himself and prayed. Karl would gladly have prayed too, but he did not dare, out there in the open, with neither church nor pastor and the day not Sunday. So he folded his hands quite simply and gazed down at the city. The driver rose, smiled at them, and, by means of gestures, made them realise that they must now dismount. They walked beside him as he led his horse slowly down the hillside to the gate of the bridge. And so they entered the city, its radiance streaming on them, its people crowding by as they passed through the streets and across the squares, past the churches ; the bells poured down their mighty flood of sound upon their heads. As in a dream they followed the young driver who led them to a small inn on a side street, where they all spent the night.

On the morrow, they were still together. Smiling and gesturing, as quickly and skilfully as though his huge unwieldy coat were no hindrance at all, the young driver led them to the post-stage and helped the father engage two seats on the noonday coach. From there, with much laughter, he took them to a little bar in one of the many streets and ordered soup and brandy for all. He ate and drank his fill serenely, let Christian pay the bill and then

accompanied his charges to the stage. To their amazement, he refused the money Christian offered him for the journey. Suddenly, his face grew very sad. Bending down, he gestured with his hand, as if indicating the height of a child, embraced the travellers again, then turned and engaged in earnest conversation with the postillion. The latter, with many melancholy and sympathetic glances towards Christian and his son, nodded and listened. Then the young fellow suddenly laughed again, waved his hand, and vanished.

Now they took the mountain road, this time in broad daylight. After a long while, they turned into a plain, leaving mountains and city behind them. All along the way, in the distance, they saw little villages of low huts whose roofs touched the ground. There were churches everywhere, and, whenever the bells rang, the people stopped to pray, no matter what they were doing or what the place. On and on they journeyed through the strange land. They knew neither the people nor the tongue they spoke, but their story—the pitiful errand of this father who had come out of a far country in search of his lost child—smoothed every difficulty along their way and won kindness on all sides. At the last stop before their destination, a tiny market centre where they had to spend the night, the innkeeper brought an old soldier to meet them, a cripple who could speak a little German and so tell the assembled guests the whole story of little Anna.

"You're looking for your child, sir?" the veteran began.

"Yes," Christian answered.

His voice was soft now.

"How many children have you?"

"Two sons and a daughter."

"Do you hear that? It's his only girl," the old man commented to his audience. They sighed; tears sprang to the women's eyes.

"Was she stolen from you?" the old man went on.

"We have been looking for her for half a year."

"The gipsies took her away," Karl broke in suddenly.

The old soldier looked at the boy.

" No, not gipsies," he said at last, " just wicked people." And to the others : " Do you hear that ? Some wicked people stole his little girl, God forgive them, and he has been looking for her for the last six months."

The women wailed aloud, wrung their hands.

" Did they kill her ? " a young woman asked, pale, trembling, obviously an expectant mother.

" They're looking for her, didn't you hear ? " the old soldier said sternly. " How could anyone be wicked enough to kill a little child ? Where do you get such ideas from ? "

" Whoever stole her might be afraid of getting punished for it," the young woman ventured timidly.

" God will forgive them," the old man said, " God will forgive them." Then turning to Christian : " Your child is not dead, you'll find her again."

" I have thought she must be dead," Christian said.

" No, no, why should she be ? What makes you think such a thing ? " The old soldier shouted in his excitement. " You can't believe in God and think that—it's wickedness. Why should she be dead ? Why should anyone be so evil as to kill a child ? In battle, yes, then it's your duty to kill ; I've done it too in my time, often ; but that was for my country and our holy faith. That's why I know that no one can be wicked enough to kill an innocent child. Yes, my friends, I've killed people in battle because I knew God made me do it ; but I could never kill a child ; God would never want that. You mustn't think wicked things ; it's against all religion. Pray to the Virgin, light candles to Her : She loves innocent children and She can intercede powerfully for your little one. But you mustn't hold evil thoughts ! "

" Perhaps she died," Christian said, shamefaced.

" Then she's with God ; she's an angel, because she was an innocent child. She has re-arisen, an angel, because Christ died for all our sakes," the old man said solemnly, crossing himself. The others did likewise.

" But you're still looking for her," he resumed cheerfully.

" She's surely alive still. You're a man of little faith. Suffer and go on believing, that's the idea, don't you see that? Where do you come from? I know there are cities in the world where people don't believe anything. But God will save you ; that's why you must go on looking for your child. God will surely save your soul ! " And, turning to the others : " God will surely save his soul," he concluded.

" Will the child he's going to see really turn out to be his child ? " the young woman asked.

" Yes, it will be his child," the old man said with conviction, " Jesus is merciful to children."

The young woman, thinking of the impending delivery of her first-born, went into a corner of the room and knelt down to pray before the ikon. Christian sat motionless, a lonely and inconsolable heart amid all these hearts filled with trust and faith. They fell silent as they watched this man, noting his white head, his lids, so heavy over his eyes, his high clear brow which the breath of destiny had touched. Christian rose and went round the room, shaking hands with each in turn. The young woman came back to the table ; turning her gentle brown eyes on Christian, she whispered into the old soldier's ear.

" She has been praying for you," the old man told him, " and for the child and her mother, too. She will light a candle for you. Yes, I say so too ; may all the Saints of Paradise be with you and the poor mother."

The two men embraced as they parted.

They went to bed early since they hoped to set out at dawn in order to reach their destination that same night. But sleep would not come to Christian. His heart thrilled as he recalled the words of the veteran, the prayers and devotion of all these strangers, the hope that shone so steadfastly in their eyes. These thoughts and others whirled through his mind, rose up in his soul against that despair that excluded all feeling save a longing for death. A mortal fear racked him. Even supposing his child were alive, could he ever go back again ? Could he ever go back to joy and work, to health and power, toiling for his wife and children ?

Could he return to the tasks of sowing and reaping, commanding and wage-giving, building and earning? Life meant a return to the wonder and order of the seasons, of day and night, of prayer and fulfilment, with death lurking somewhere in the background, ready to strike swift and hard, like a murderer, or gently to snuff out the candle with a pitying hand. Could he return to life again and face it?

He got up and roamed about the room. In the candlelight he gazed down at his sleeping son. Could he love all this again? Could he recapture the old existence surrounded by his wife and boys and the adorable Anna? Could he bear once more the splendid burden of happiness? He wrung his hands, pressed them against his heart. Would he receive a sign of the infinite goodness of God?

Sleepless, he waited impatiently for daybreak, woke Karl and hastened to set off. At five o'clock, shortly after dusk, they reached their destination. Krasnan was neither so large nor so magically beautiful as the city at the edge of the mountains. But lights shone everywhere and here, too, the crowds moved to and fro past churches with many domes and bells that rang all day long. Bells, everywhere, set in high towers or on high pillars dominating the square or in niches at the entrance of great houses and palaces or tinkling in the interior of the churches. The likeness of Godhead met them here, of God the Father, of the Son, crucified, and of the Divine Mother, with Her beautiful smile and Her hands stretched forth in blessing. The little red light burned perpetually at Her feet, its flame rising upwards towards Her face. Their altars were never empty, their names lay ever on the lips of the faithful; now Christian grasped why all this people implored the Mother and Her Son to intercede for them and bear their prayers to the mystic God, Whose countenance no man might behold and live.

For a long time, Christian stood before a small chapel, watching the people enter and kneel before the Madonna, and, their prayer finished, leave with peace—or at least

calm—illumining their faces. He could not kneel and pray as they did ; but he raised his eyes and felt the breath of their humility and purity.

At the police station, he showed his passport and other papers. Graciously they asked him to wait while they sent him a messenger for the teacher, Röder, in whose house the child lived. He came within half an hour and greeted Christian cordially. Röder, who had been teaching German and philosophy for fifteen years, was an elderly man, small in stature and very frail-looking. His hair was grizzly. It was difficult to see his bright dreamy blue eyes because of his gold-rimmed glasses, whose rims were very wide and dazzlingly polished, and because he twisted and bobbed his head continually while he spoke. He pulled Christian along with him, at first not even noticing Karl, who followed shyly behind them, and, in a torrent of words, began to tell how he had found the child. He had taken her from a filthy, verminous beggar-woman whom he had noticed speaking German one day. At first he had only thought of keeping the child for a day, to feed her and care for her a little ; but his wife had called him in when she was bathing the little creature, and, seeing how pretty she was and how fair her hair, noticing later her charming manner of saying " Please " and " Thank you " to everything, knowing at a glance that care and cleanliness were natural to her, he soon suspected that she had grown up in surroundings far different from those the beggars supplied. Then, one day, suddenly, in the midst of a lecture on Kant's categorical imperative, he had remembered the case of Anna Scheffel. He could not wait for the end of the school day ; he sent home for the German newspapers in which he had read about the case and, comparing the picture and description of the lost child with the little girl he had found, he came to the conclusion that this must be she. He immediately informed the police, who had forwarded the news to the father ; ever since had been searching for the old beggar-woman. This beggar-woman, the alleged mother, had come twice on the first evening to take the child away. But

she had been unable to give a proper reply when they asked for the identity of the child's father, its birthplace and its exact age ; and, when they suggested she leave the child there for a few days, she agreed at once. She had not been seen since. In the meantime, however, in spite of all their care, the child had fallen ill of what the doctor diagnosed as inflammation of the lungs. She had been most touchingly patient and gentle in all her suffering. When they asked her her name, she always answered Anna ; when they mentioned her parents, she would begin to cry.

They reached the teacher's house, climbed the two flights of stairs that led to his flat. A lamp lit the hallway faintly. Röder lowered his voice and whispered to the father :

" Of course I can understand you want to see your child as soon as possible, but to-day is the first day she has had no fever and she has been asleep since morning. Could you make a great sacrifice and wait until to-morrow ? Or else perhaps you could just creep up to her bed without awaking her."

" I will wait," Christian said.

" That is right ; you are a true father. Of course you will stay here with us. You can sleep quite near her and early in the morning you shall see her. My wife and I have grown to love our little foundling very much ; we shall be very sad to see her go. Welcome to our home ! " he concluded, again shaking Christian's hand. He shook hands with Karl, too.

His wife entered, small like himself, a grey-haired, faded woman but with kind eyes. She looked long at Christian, pressed his hand, deeply moved. Then they all tiptoed into the warm and comfortable living-room.

An old servant came in and set the table. Every motion, walking to and fro, the opening and shutting of doors, the laying of the table was done silently, with great care not to disturb the sleeping child.

At last, when they were alone, the father drew his son to him. " To-morrow we shall see sister and we shall all be happy ! " he said, for he believed it now himself.

" I'm happy now," Karl answered, his eyes shining.

They lay down, Christian with one ear to the wall, listening for the least sound in the next room ; but all was still. A peaceful hush lay upon the whole house ; soon father and son were lost in a deep, dreamless sleep.

It was broad daylight when they awoke. It was December 10th, a bright clear winter morning. The snow shone upon the roofs. A soft dim gold seemed to veil the sky, and, from snow and sky, a radiance streamed through the windows. Excited, father and son dressed in haste, impatient as they were to see the child. Soon Frau Röder came in, her face wreathed in smiles, and signed to them to follow her. They entered a spacious light room, in the centre of which stood a little white crib, painted with cherubs peeping out of delicate pink clouds ; white and pink curtains of the finest material hung down from the canopy. In the past, the crib had belonged to the Röders' only son, who had died in his childhood. The little foundling sat up playing with a doll. As the three came in, she looked up and smiled. Christian, his strength deserting him, reached for his son's hand, clutched at the door for support. At last ! This child must be Anna, Anna ! . . .

Frau Röder went slowly towards the little girl.

" Who is that ? " she asked, pointing at Christian.

" Papa," said the child softly.

Suddenly she stretched out her arms, offering him the doll. With an effort, Christian drew nearer and put out his trembling hand to take the doll.

" You take it ! " the child said, laughing.

Christian bent down slowly until his head was close to hers ; her fair, tumbled hair swam before his eyes, but he did not dare touch or kiss the little head. Frau Röder, her eyes filled with tears, asked her :

" Is that your daddy ? "

The child nodded, looked at Christian again, and stretched out her arms, laughing.

" Where is your mama ? " Frau Röder asked. At once her

smile vanished : she burst into sobs, cried for her mother. A terrible fit of coughing shook her ; it was a long time before she could be quieted. As soon as she had stopped crying, she fell asleep from utter lassitude.

Christian would not leave her bedside ; he could not take his eyes off the child's face. She looked pale, wasted ; bluish shadows circled her closed eyes ; her lips were shut far too tightly over her little mouth ; her tiny claw-like hands lay waxen white on the pink coverlet.

Karl joined him at the bedside.

" There's our Anna," he said in a whisper, " what a pretty bed she's got ! Can we take her home now ? "

The father nodded. He bent over her again ; her soft breath fanned his face. Grievously, his blood rose, thawed the cold of his heart, then, flowing painfully back through his great body, roared in his brain, until at last his despair melted away, his heart wept and tears welled up in his burning eyes. He fell on his knees ; his tears trickled down upon the child's curly hair. He was convinced now, humbled and full of faith ; yet, as he brought his face close to the child's, as though to breathe her breath into his lungs, the nearer he approached, the further something seemed to keep him. It was a stranger's blood he scented, a stranger's breath he breathed, never the powerful mysterious echo of his own nor the divine mirror of himself. No, this child was not the seal of flesh and blood that marked his deep, mystic union with another ; this child was not the crowning of his love.

Slowly he drew back, rose again and sat down to wait for the child to awake.

After a while she opened her eyes, looked at the man and smiled.

" Have you my dolly ? " she asked, in perfect confidence.

Christian gave it to her. The little girl caught his hand, cried out for joy at the big signet ring on his finger, rubbed her soft cheek against his hand, and, with her little fingers, began to pull off the ring. Old memories crowded in upon Christian.; he began to play with her teasingly, closing

and opening his fist, while the child, laughing merrily, grasped at his finger. At last she held the ring, slipped it over the two last fingers of her little right hand, still laughing. This was exactly the same game father and child had played together the night before she had vanished. His room at home passed before his sight : he saw the child's bed and his wife handing her to him, her face shining with happiness.

Then he remembered the scar on the little left breast ; he had never seen it, for his wife had blushingly laid her hand over the child's nakedness. Remembering this, even now he did not dare lift the child's nightgown and look for it. He called Frau Röder and asked her whether she had noticed a scar on the child's body when she had bathed her. He telegraphed home, inquiring whether the scar had been visible to the end. Three days later the answer came. Then Frau Röder undressed the child before him ; he gazed in dread upon the little girl's body, so small, so pitifully thin. Tenderly, Christian thought of Martha. There was no scar.

In the meantime, they had arrested the beggar-woman with whom the child had been found. She had no papers but insisted that the child was hers. Not that she would not be glad to give her away, especially as she was sick, and, wherever she was, she would be better off than with her. The mother was kept in custody until her identity could be established.

Christian spent the whole day playing with the child. He would bend low over her crib while she threw her little arms around his neck, laughed in his ear. She liked to rub her soft cheeks against his hands caressingly, to play with the ring on his finger, while she sang or talked softly to herself. She was so like his own Anna that often he stood watching her, baffled. At the very outset, she had called him Daddy, had been all confidence and tenderness with him. But she seemed not to remember Karl ; when he came near her, she would ward him off. In vain the father tried to remind her of her mother or her home, the garden and

the house, the duck pond, the horses, and other things his child had loved so much. When he asked her about her mother, her face fell, and fear possessed her, banishing her gaiety.

Her illness persisted in spite of their loving care ; bit by bit, her strength ebbed away, while they went on hoping against hope.

One evening, when Christian had sat beside her for a long time as she slept, the thought of Martha grew too strong for him. He had, of course, been thinking of her a great deal lately, but now a great longing came over him to talk to her, to confide to her what he was feeling. That night he waited till his son was asleep, rose softly and wrote a letter to Martha.

" *Dearest wife,—I arrived here safely with Karl after our long journey and found the child. She looked so much like ours and had the same pretty way of talking and laughing, so I telegraphed to you at once about the scar. But this proof is lacking and we have not been granted the great joy of finding our Anna again. For us, her parents, there is still no answer to our terrible question. Is she dead or alive ? Is she in the hands of evil people ? Has she perhaps become evil herself ? Is she already buried underground ?—We do not know. . . .*

" *Ah, Martha, I must ask your forgiveness and that is why I am writing this. I want you to know how sorry I am, and it may be a long time before I can leave here.*

" *I did not come to you, I thrust you away from me, even though I felt in my heart that you had never given up waiting for me. But I was a dead man in a living shell, and you were still alive. Now I feel I am as though re-arisen ; now I feel I must come back to you. Perhaps you will not understand me : I have been lost in silence for so long.*

" *When I saw this child here, so much like ours—her name is Anna, she calls me Daddy, just as our child did—at once I felt she was not ours, for as I kissed her, I found nothing in her of you, her mother. You, it was, I sought from the earliest moment of my life, at the time a man first begins to think of women.*

I found you ; you followed me. Oh, forgive me for ever having held you off !

" *I intend to bring this child back with me when she has recovered from her illness and I have been able to find out who she is. Even if she is not ours, we will give her our love and we will raise her ; and she will become ours, not through blood but by virtue of the love that made us take her and care for her.*

" *Farewell, beloved wife. I hope you are quite well again ; the doctor told me when I left that you were not seriously ill. Look after the house ; Blank will keep an eye on the farm—that is all we shall have to live on for some time to come.*

" *Karl is doing very well here ; he is filled with surprise at this strange new world and with love for his new little sister.*

" *The police are doing all they can ; not a soul here but knows of our misfortune. Yet a higher hand moves through our destinies and all the works of men are in vain.*

" *Farewell. My love to my son and my sister, to Emma and the others.*

" *All my love to you in a fond embrace.*

" *Your husband,*
" *Christian.*"

At dawn, while the others were sleeping, he sent the maid out to post the letter.

Next day, the child was better. They dressed her ; Christian carried her around the room singing songs and keeping time as he walked. Gradually she made friends with Karl ; now he too crawled on all fours on the floor and rode her on his back. But the improvement did not last ; five days later she was in bed with a high fever. The room no longer rang with her laughter.

Her mother came on the morrow. She had established her identity as the wife of a workman in Germany, whom she had deserted to go off with a tramp. The police let her go. She was clad in dirty rags ; her whole appearance betrayed her poverty and immorality. She begged to see the child ; they took her to its bedside. The moment she saw her, she screamed :

" She's dying, O God, she's dying ! "

The child woke up and shouted with joy at the sight of her mother. With what little strength she still possessed, she raised herself in bed, threw her arms around the mother and hugged her close. Then she collapsed, exhausted, suffering herself to be put back to bed. The mother left soon after, sobbing bitterly. She was never seen again.

On Christmas day, very early in the morning, they found her dead. The night before she had fallen into a peaceful sleep ; Frau Röder watched beside her until shortly before dawn. Early in the morning, the teacher's wife returned with Christian, her arms full of toys and presents. But she could not wake the child. It had breathed its last— alone.

They laid the child in a little white coffin, with little white stars painted on it ; and, following the custom of the country, they burned tall candles by it night and day. With the sad knowledge born of her own experience, Frau Röder had washed and dressed the little foundling, combed her hair, matted with the sweat of death, loosed the clenched hands and folded them together over a spray of green pine.

Christian stood before the little corpse, the image of his own child. Terror seized him at this portent : he knew that what he had believed in the beginning was true and that his own child lay dead, too. For here Anna lay before him, as though reflected in an earthly mirror.

Karl sobbed ; the woman wept soundlessly. Herr Röder stood in a corner of the room, speechless, his head sunk on his breast, his hands clasped behind him. He grieved that all his efforts had been in vain.

On the morrow, they asked for the child's mother, and, at the tavern where she lived, they learned that she had joined a company of vagabonds, and left town.

Four days later, the teacher and his wife, Christian and Karl Scheffel and the old servant, who insisted upon coming too, buried the child. She was put to rest in the section given over to foreigners ; on her little grave, they

set a wooden cross, with angels, roses and the name ANNA carved upon it. Early in January, Christian and Karl took leave of their hosts and set out homeward.

Christian had hoped for another message from Treuen but none came. They started out on a stormy, dark morning. They managed to complete the first lap of their journey through the snow, but with the greatest difficulty. At last, after considerable delay, they reached the great town at the foot of the mountain. Here a furious blizzard detained them three days longer ; every road was quite impassable. Black clouds hung in the sky ; the days were but a wan twilight between two darknesses. At last, during the fourth night, the storm abated. Once more, light shone ; the sky reappeared, clear-swept. But earth lay ravaged : houses and cottages had collapsed as their roofs gave way under the heavy snows ; everywhere people lay frozen to death, buried in the snow wherever they had happened to stray. Famine reigned in the land. Everybody worked to load the enormous masses of snow on sleighs and carry them to the river. It grew colder ; the snow froze rapidly as they threw it in great heaps on the frozen surface of the broad river ; soon it rose in mountains all along the river's length. By means of oil-fires, they thawed the frozen springs, made room to open the doors of the churches and of the stables, where the cattle lay on the ground, perishing of hunger and cold. Here and there small fires broke out, to be extinguished at once with snow.

Silent, anonymous, like the others, father and son helped in the work of rescue. Food came to them from somewhere ; at night they slept by some warm oven, far from their hotel. But, on the second day, the bells began to ring out again over the half-ruined, silent town. Lights shone once more ; the saints smiled down from their high pillars ; black streams of people moved along the narrow tracks of streets towards the open portals of churches ; the peal of organs, the chanting of hymns and the passionate exhortations of the young priests rang across the city. Christian was tempted to enter and kneel there too, with his eyes

open to the image of God, and his ears to the holy words and song. But the tragic revelation he had known in that decisive hour in the church at home, rose again in his heart, filling it at once with light and darkness, now and for ever. With his foot already on the church steps, he turned back.

More by instinct than by conscious search, they found their way back to the hotel. Their room and baggage were intact. Despite the greatest care, their funds were running low ; they were therefore eager to leave as soon as possible. Finally, after a week of clear frost, they managed to obtain two seats in a stage-carriage which, with many détours, went as far as the border. When they left, the host refused to take any money except a tip for the servant ; with gestures and embraces, he gave Christian to understand that they appreciated his help in their hour of need.

The journey was arduous, the cold almost unbearable ; death hovered about them in every field ; the corpses of innumerable animals, lying where they had died of hunger and cold, dotted the white snow.

As soon as they were on native soil again, Christian sent a telegram to announce his arrival. In Markt-Tiebesdorf, his sister was waiting for them, clad in mourning. Here, too, death greeted Christian ; they had buried Martha the week before. News of her death, delayed by the terrible weather, had not reached him before he left ; before Christian and Karl could cross the threshold of their house, they must go to the grave that held wife and mother.

They drove home from the churchyard by sleigh. Reaching Treuen, they crossed the courtyard and went into the house. Gustav came running up to meet them. He rushed to his brother and flung his arms around him, sobbing as though his heart would break. At the sight of her master's face, Emma covered her head with her apron and ran from the hall.

Christian went straight to the bedroom. The curtains were drawn ; a dim half-light filled the room. A great sheet lay over the broad bed ; the child's crib, that had stood

along its foot, was gone. In its place was the chest, open and empty ; looking into its dark hollow, Christian realised in all its bitterness the death of his wife. He left the room, went downstairs again, drew his two distraught young sons towards him and led them out of the kitchen into the parlour.

Here everything was changed ; the furniture had been moved about, the walls freshly painted, new curtains decked the windows, fresh sprays of pine and fir were everywhere and, in the middle of the room, stood a tall Christmas tree with candles.

" Who arranged all this so prettily ? " Christian asked.

" Mother."

" And now she's dead and sister is dead, too," Karl said, trying to realise it.

" Yes," Christian said, " God has sent us great misfortunes but you are young. You will forget. And I am alive : I shall look after you."

He sat down with his children and Klara, talked to them, urged them to eat. He watched their faces closely, sought to banish the shadows of pain and despair that lay upon them ; and, as he saw their sorrow mitigated, he sent them out, bidding them unpack and urging Karl to tell Gustav all their experiences.

When the children were gone, Christian and Klara were silent for a long time. At last he asked :

" How did it happen ? "

" It happened very suddenly. The first time I saw her after you had gone, she was sitting in the kitchen by the stove. She still looked very ill. Her eyes were unnaturally bright. She was very lively, but weak. I came over every Sunday ; each time she was better. Just before Christmas, she and Emma began to clean the house from cellar to attic. She changed everything round in the parlour and had the walls painted ; she even went to town twice with Emma to buy presents and candles for Christmas. We spent Christmas Eve here ; she had a gift for all of us. She was very gay, far too gay I thought. But she didn't come to

church with us. She never mentioned you once, all the time, and when we asked about you, she would not answer."

"Did she get my letter?"

"Yes, she got it."

"When?"

"She was very ill at the time!"

"How did that happen?"

Klara hesitated.

"Tell me. Tell me everything."

"We all went to church on Christmas Eve. She wished it. But she refused to go with us and she would not let me stay with her either. So I went with the others although I had a feeling something was wrong and it frightened me. When we came back, we saw a light in the bedroom; but when I went there, it was empty. Anna's crib had gone, too. We looked for her everywhere; at last we found her in the attic lying on the floor in the dark by a burnt-out candle. There was blood on her mouth."

The sister fell silent.

"What was she doing in the attic so late at night?"

"Christian, she had taken the crib apart and carried it up there. It was too much for her, the doctor said. It brought on a hæmorrhage."

For a long time, they sat there without speaking. Christian seemed to feel his wife near him and that hunger for life in her which he, hungry for death, had denied, as he thrust her from him.

"When did she get my letter?" he asked again.

"About a week later," Klara explained. "She was scarcely conscious then and her fever was very high. I opened the letter and read it over to her three times. The first two times, I don't think she understood it; she kept on talking about a new child and the new crib she needed for it. But one day, later, she grew quite calm; her glance was clear as she looked at me. So I said:

"'Christian has written to you, Martha. Shall I read what he says?'

" She made no sound, did not move ; she simply stared at me. I sat down on the side of her bed and read the letter to her again, very slowly, word for word."

" Did she understand ? "

" I don't know."

" Did she say anything ? "

" Not for a long time. I folded the letter up and put it in her hand. Her hand was very cold but it closed tightly over your letter. After a while she said quite slowly and distinctly : ' We shall be happy again.' And from then, until the end, she was always smiling, even in death, though she suffered terribly the last night."

" Were you with her ? "

" Yes : so was Emma. It was dreadful. She was choking ! "

Overwhelmed by the memory, Klara relapsed into silence ; she wept bitterly. A long time passed. Dusk had fallen and the room was dark, before she trusted herself to speak. And her voice was very low.

" When the spasm was past, she smiled again. After that everything went easily ; we didn't even notice when it was over. She still held your letter in her hand, I smoothed it out and, at the very end, I laid it on her breast under the shroud. So she took it with her."

The brother reached for her hand.

It was quite dark when they rose to put on the light. Klara said :

" I can't feel anything any longer. All this has been too much ! "

" Yes, it has been too much."

" I have prayed and prayed."

" What for, sister ? "

" For mercy."

" All I hoped for was death ! " Christian said. " But I go on living. God's mercy is for the others. That is my consolation."

" Why not for us ? "

" That will come to me in death. God struck me ; I

struck Martha and all the others. But I have learned better now. So far as it lies in my power, I shall never strike anyone or be harsh to anyone ever again—no, not even the murderer of my child. Life was clear to me once ; it continued clear for a long time. Then something came to obscure it. Now my only hope is that my death may be beautiful."

He had lit the light ; Klara stood beside him, watching. His face was scarcely human. His tangled white hair had grown long ; it hung over his forehead, which was radiant and quite unwrinkled. That radiance fell upon his heavy eyelids and deeply furrowed cheeks ; it illuminated the tousled beard that covered his clenched, bitter mouth. In repose and in movement, his tall figure now betrayed the disintegration of his once magnificent strength ; yet his face revealed the lofty power of his soul, transfigured.

He looked round the room.

" I shall not sleep down here," he said, " Martha never liked me to. I shall sleep in the bedroom upstairs. It shall stay just as she arranged it. Must you go home to-night, Klara ? Please stay with me."

" I will stay."

" You know, I shall send Karl and Gustav away to school next spring. Of course, I shall have to work rather hard for two or three years here to keep them there ; but I am well and strong. How is everything at home ? "

" Very well, thanks. All too well. We had a good crop and sold our foals for a high price. But I want nothing to do with it all. My husband drinks ; he has attacks of asthma at night."

" Can't you do anything ? "

" I do look after him. So far, my life has been vain. I have no children ; I have nothing—nothing—neither good nor evil. God has struck you, but me He has forgotten. Life has forgotten me, too. I shall be glad to stay by your side and mourn with you."

" You can do a great deal for me, Klara," Christian said gently, " you can both weep and mourn for me : I can do

neither, now. Tell me how much I owe you for Martha's funeral expenses. I should like to pay that."

"Christian?"

"No, please. That is all part of the same thing."

"I can't tell you . . . I don't know . . ."

"Bring me the bills, then. Everything must be properly settled, not for my sake but for the others who are still alive."

"I bought a plot in your name, for all of us. It will be ready in the spring. You couldn't see it to-day."

He went over to her and stroked her hair. The deep bond of flesh and blood stirred within them; it filled their hearts with a sense of happiness.

Supper was served in the great kitchen; all the household were already seated at the table when they came in. Christian greeted them one and all; and, as Emma burst into sobs, he pressed her shoulder, soothed her. He made Karl and Gustav sit on either side of him and turned frequently to gaze at their lithe tall bodies and at their faces so like their mother's. He talked much with them, too, and the ring of their clear young voices, as they answered, served to break the heavy respectful silence of the others. A low murmur of conversation arose; their faces cleared: the kitchen was warm, the food good; the master was back again, they could all be happy now. The meal lasted for almost an hour, everyone listening eagerly to the master as he talked to his sons about his journey, the foreign country he had visited, its great cities, the snowstorm and the rescue work they had done. By a tacit understanding, the child was not mentioned.

Soon afterwards, they all went to bed. Emma, always the last, put out the light in the kitchen and locked the doors. But once more she must go into the boys' room to make sure all was well. They were still awake, whispering from bed to bed. She sat down by them as she had done when they were little.

"Tell me about Anna," Emma urged, as she covered his head and forehead with kisses. "Do, Karl. You know,

your father said nothing about her. Didn't you find her again after all ? "

" Oh yes," the boy answered, " we found a little girl who was exactly like our Anna."

" Did she have the scar, too ? " Emma asked in feverish suspense.

" No, she didn't have a scar, but she was exactly like our Anna, she truly was, Emma."

" How do you mean : exactly like her ? The same curls ? "

" Yes."

" Did she laugh the same way ? What did she say ? "

" She called father Daddy. And she laughed and played with him just as Anna did."

" God have mercy on us ! "

" We were going to bring her home with us, but she died."

" Died ! She—died—too ! "

" Emma," Karl asked in a whisper, " why did Mother die ? "

Emma rose, groped for the boys' faces in the darkness, and kissed them.

" You can say your prayers," she told them, as she left. " Say them. There's too much sorrow in this house ! "

A sudden panic seized her ; she, too, felt that no mourning or praying could avail. For a long time, she lay sleepless that night, sighing and grieving.

Only in the bedroom, a light burned. Here Christian stood before the chest at the foot of the bed. He was thinking of his wife, but there was nothing human in the memory. He could not recall how she looked or smiled or spoke ; yet urgently, baffling in its clarity he could feel the breath of her being, he could see her dark glance levelled on his eyes, just as when he first knew her.

Once more his childhood fear gripped him. He felt her kisses as she drew him into her deep embrace. He re-created the dark hours of the children's births, parting them so far and so implacably ; experienced the awful night of death, into which she had now descended, leaving him to the

many nights of life, grey shadows of that utter darkness. And, as he turned off the light and sank into the bed which she had for ever deserted, it was as though once more he brought a man's love to the dark magic of her desire. He closed his eyes and lay thus sleepless, the night through, remembering his wife.

CHAPTER VI

The cold grew intense ; it almost overpowered them. Already, with only half of January gone by, their store of wood had fallen so low that Blank had to buy a load or two from the Royal Forestry and haul it himself with Fritz's help. Ice covered everything. The ground crackled underfoot, window-panes cracked, the well had to be thawed out with great difficulty each morning, and, on opening the cow-stall one day, they found a calf, frozen to death where it had lain down to sleep. The horses were wrapped in warm covers, their legs bound closely with woollen cloths. In secret and very proud of himself, Fritz had hung two lighted lanterns in the hen-coop to thaw the ice which formed along the roosts. Four of the fattest pigs died from swallowing hot food which had to be brought almost boiling into their shed, to prevent its freezing as it was carried across the yard. But the ravenous creatures had plunged their snouts into the pans before they could be restrained.

In the kitchen, the fire was now never allowed to go out. Lights burned day and night ; everyone gathered there when the day's work was over. They would sit in the grateful warmth, and venture out only when sleep overcame them, rushing to their quarters, their faces buried in their coat-collars. Once there, they would lie down in their icy beds without undressing. But no one fell ill ; the master looked after everything. In order to economise on the cottage fires, he arranged, as far as possible, to use them in the house where they could all be together in comfort. Any evening one might see three maids in one corner, bent over their precious bags of feathers, stripping quills ; in another corner, by the window, the carpenter working on the chests the boys were to take with them on their journey in the spring ; sitting on the floor, under the middle window, the

children and duck-girls peeling willows, cutting them into lengths and plaiting them into baskets and hampers. The huge table, which ordinarily stood under the window, had been pushed back against the stove ; Emma sat at her place in the middle, sewing or knitting with four old women beside her, busied with their spinning-wheels. When the cooking began, the odours of food mingled with those of people, wood, glue and paint. But that was when the kitchen was at its warmest, for as soon as the fire went down, however little, the bitter cold crept in again, in spite of the moss banked at least an inch against the window-chinks and of the fleece packed round the door-frames. People stamped their feet ; they rose, one after another, and began to pace the room with anxious glances towards the sheds from which, occasionally, some animal's thin complaining whine reached them across the frozen silence. Twice a week, at the master's orders, Emma had the two great laundry boilers heated, for, in the servants' quarters, the water was frozen solid and everyone washed in the kitchen. Christian had also given orders that on Sundays Blank was to read aloud from the Bible, beginning at a page opened at random by one of the children, blindfolded. Karl and Gustav had also to take turns saying the Lord's Prayer. Nobody had attempted to go to church since one Sunday, when Emma had started out with the boys and been forced to turn back because of the bitter cold.

The master joined them only at meals, but they knew that now, as in the old days, he thought of them. He talked much with the steward of his plans for the spring : how he meant to increase the herds and crops, how their timber might be sold to best advantage, in short, how the utmost potentialities of the place might be realised. His decision to send the boys to school in the town was unwavering. In vain the steward objected that it was wholly unnecessary, since they could find no better training anywhere than on this farm of their own, with its model organisation and the various activities of grain and stock, hunting and fishing, not to mention the workshops. Christian could not deny

it, yet with a new, surprising readiness to take others into his confidence, he told Blank the boys must go to school next spring at the latest, in spite of obstacles, financial or other. For Christian felt that evil and terror still loomed over his house already so ill-starred, and he was determined to protect his sons.

Occasionally he would call Karl in for these councils ; he also entrusted him with the simple book-keeping for the dairy, which had once been Martha's task. The boy took up this work with great pride, but it made small demands upon him, for the cows gave little milk and butter-making was a matter of extreme difficulty, since the milk froze instantly in the churns. There was no more going to market. Many of the hens had been killed, for they no longer laid, and there was a scarcity of food. It was impossible to break through the frozen ground to the vegetables underneath. These were hard days, yet their minds were at rest. The impalpable, grim tragedy had given way to the toil, the joys and the cares of every day. Sitting together in the immense kitchen, huddled about the warm stove, while, from outside, the sinister brilliance of the winter day shone into the room, they abandoned themselves wholeheartedly to their work, grateful for the twofold protection from its chill. The work was light, fell smoothly under their hands ; their contentment returned as they talked and laughed and met the coming night with a song, some choral or, occasionally, a Christmas carol which they had not sung during the holidays because of the mistress upstairs, who lay dying.

Only two persons felt dark intimations of coming doom and these were precisely the two who had gone through the family tragedy with the greatest tranquillity. Emma and Fritz knew worry and care now.

It seemed to Emma that death had returned to Martha by her own will the very day she had stood once more upon the threshold of life. Ever since a premonition of evil had stirred Emma, faint at first but rising to its full intensity the night her master had returned from his far journey

with tidings of little Anna's death. A mysterious fearful will urged her to try to discover on whose sinful account these evils had been visited upon Treuen. To her, the tragedy could not be merely misfortune ; it was clearly the fulfilment of some diabolic curse or of some divine retribution. From that moment, she became a different woman. Her heart, once filled with love for all and especially for her own son, now entertained only two feelings : fear and mistrust. Once she had been passionately loyal to her master ; now she tracked him furtively and followed his every action. It surprised her that he now seemed more cheerful than before ; on the contrary, since everything was irremediably lost, he should have been infinitely sad. While the servants sat about her in the kitchen, never dreaming that they were under observation, she passed each one of them in distrustful review, recalling each detail of their careers.

But their sins, as she knew them, were neither many nor capital. An unlawful kiss or two between a married hand and some young girl day-labourer was soon found out and brought to book by the master, who let the culprits off with a warning ; some childish theft occasionally among the younger maids, when a kerchief or a necklace went astray, was easily punished and expiated. They all said their prayers and did their work ; strict decency and order were exacted at Treuen, year in and year out. There had been nothing more serious than a few trifling frivolities ; it had never once been necessary to marry any of the girls in haste ; since harvest-time, last year, no one had been drunk ; there had been no quarrelling. Where, then, did the evil come from ? For whose dire sin were they all being persecuted ?

Emma began to avoid her fellows ; often she would conceal her mistrustful, anxious glances, for she herself was ashamed of them. Sometimes she would tell herself that the curse was fulfilled by Anna's disappearance and Martha's death. Yet her suspense continued. She observed her son, unknown to him ; but all that she could see was that his

handsome face had grown paler and thinner. She suffered a twinge when she recalled how hard and tirelessly he had worked all that summer. Mother and son now lived almost continually among the others ; the intimate, chance encounters they had loved no longer occurred nowadays ; and endearments and little affectionate embraces, therefore, ceased to pass between them altogether. Recalling how late this expression of tenderness had entered into their relationship, Emma was sorry ; frequently she blamed herself for his loveless childhood. She prayed for him every night. Time after time she recalled the dreadful first days of despair when things were at their worst and darkness had encompassed them all, while he alone had retained his serenity and held up his head. His mellow voice would echo in her memory ; she would hear him singing in the choir-loft and think of him as one of God's chosen, more innocent and pure than other men.

As for Fritz, he too was unhappy. In summer it had been so easy for him to escape from himself ; now, however, he must sit, restive and full of hatred, in a group that included himself, Karl, Gustav, and the duck-girls, all of them engaged on one piece of work. He resented the fact that the chill winter had forced him out of his solitude into the close neighbourhood of others. It took all his will-power to restrain himself, to show diligence and calm as he wove boxes and baskets with them, always careful lest his fingers met theirs.

There was much laughter among the young people. Karl and Gustav used to tease the girls, tying their long plaits to chairs and weaving the hem of Minna's skirt into the basket with the willow strands, so that when she tried to get up from the floor, she found herself held fast, her skirt pulled so tight that it rose above her knees, revealing the curve of her legs. The boys and girls blushed and began to fight in their embarrassment, until at last the skirt was freed again and the two duck-girls, half laughing, half crying, rushed out of the room. Fritz sat still, his lips pressed together ; his hands gripped the edge of the basket ; he

neither moved nor laughed. His sluggish blood rose slowly to his face ; it glowed under his skin, dark and menacing. His lips parted, trembled. He rose suddenly and left the room.

His knees giving under him, stumbling as he moved forward, he crossed the yard and fled into the cowstall, out of the reach of human warmth and of the bitter cold outdoors.

The stall was dark. A heavy smell of straw and dung pierced the cold air. The animals, huddled together, gave forth a warm steam that rose in a little cloud about them ; from time to time a pitiful lowing broke the monotonous grinding of their jaws, ruminating. Their great dark bodies, crowded together, rose and fell in the dark stall like mysterious waves in a still pool ; their udders gleamed palely through the darkness. Fritz looked about him, seeking some work to relieve the growing fury in him. But at this hour of the day there was nothing to do. He stood still, staring at the animals, while the cold gathered about him, prisoned him in an armour of ice. Then all he could feel was his heart beating softly, gently, temptingly. He ground his teeth together, fiercely : his other face now shone, evil and savage, distorting his fine features into the murderer's mask. His eyes rolled wildly under his closed lids.

The most powerful of all laws that move in the depths of every living creature, the impulse to generate, dwelled in his blood too, unknown to him, yet growing, as his body grew, ever since that distant, enigmatic moment, long before his birth, when life first quickened him. But joy and love had laid upon this one soul a lust that would never be stilled in joy, but rather drive him to solitude and crime.

Fritz, of course, knew nothing of this : for him evil joy was innocent joy, and mercy was granted him because of his ignorance. His dark blood raged within him, but his body remained icebound. He stood stock still in the cowshed, his limbs devoid of sensation, his heart beating softly, the cold and darkness all about him, the quiet beasts lying on the ground before him, their cumbrous bodies blurred

into an indistinguishable mass. The muffled constant stamp of the horses' hoofs in the stable beyond brought him back to consciousness. He turned to go but his rigid legs hardly obeyed his will ; he had to push them before him, step by step, like wooden sticks ; he reeled like a drunken man. It made him laugh.

At last he reached the stable. With the blood pounding in his ears, the pawing of the horses' hoofs came to him like thunder. The horses stood with their heads pressed together, striking out with their hind legs. Fritz approached them, his limbs numbed by the cold, his ears by their thundering hoofs. The rush of blood blinded his eyes ; the mad throbbing of his heart choked him. Slowly, woodenly, he stretched his hand, trying to stroke the mouth of one of the horses ; but he could feel nothing. Filled with fear and desire, he waited for the evil spell of soft flesh against his flesh and the wild pulse of another heart answering his own. Soon the damp velvety nostrils breathed warmth into his hand, nuzzling it gently ; at last he felt the silky skin pressing, caressing. His heart clamoured in answer. The horse kicked out ; its hoof struck his thigh ; Fritz staggered back and fell. He felt no pain in his frozen limbs ; and as he raised his throbbing head, he began to laugh that voiceless hissing laugh which could not shake his frozen body but only rocked him, to and fro, as though he were made of wood. He laughed for a long while, until his passion was spent ; then he rose painfully, dragging himself back to the cowshed, step by step, as he had come. Suddenly it occurred to him that he must set everything right. He looked down at himself but nothing was amiss, his clothes were not undone. He searched through the darkness ; but there was nothing to hide, nothing to bury. He caught sight of a wide-pronged fork in a corner ; seized it in an access of frenzied energy and set to work. He forced his numb hands to steadiness as he hacked, raked and heaped up the frozen dung covering the ground with a thick crust to the edge of the stalls. Fatigue and calm fell upon him as he worked.

Suddenly, the sharp prongs of the fork struck, with a

full thud, in a dark corner, piled high with old straw. He pulled the fork away and found that he had impaled a rat, the centre prongs gutting its breast and belly. It squeaked ; in the darkness he saw only its legs, struggling desperately, and its glittering black eyes. As he raised his tool, a drop of dark blood fell to the floor. Slowly, Fritz brought the rake down again, pushed the rat off carefully with his right foot and trod upon it. His ears caught the soft crackling of its bones, but his numbed foot, which fell heavy and dead as stone, felt no sensation. No hole could be dug in the frozen floor of the shed, so he buried the dead creature in a hole in the frozen manure. He made a fresh mound over it, strewed it with clean straw, and, as he did so, began to sing softly. His stiff hands moved faster now ; presently, hearing the milkmaids clattering through the yard with their pails, he went to meet them at the door. His face was pale, calm and gentle as before. Everything had been set right ; nothing at all had happened. A strange feeling of lightness was in him, as though his own body did not exist. He had to push his legs with effort, yet he seemed to be borne on wings across the yard.

Although the icy air, which had long since penetrated his body, now attacked his face, so that his cheeks and ears ached, he would not return to the warm kitchen where he must sit with the others. He stood hesitating in the cold as his mother came to the door. Over her head and shoulders she had wrapped a wide scarf ; she held it against her mouth as she spoke. She noticed the pallor of his face, now drawn and pinched with cold.

" Where have you been, Fritz ? "

" In the cowshed . . . tidying up a bit. . . . "

" What were you doing that for in such weather ? It's enough to make you ill : the master doesn't want that. We do what has to be done and leave the rest till it gets warmer. You missed vespers too. Hurry up now and fetch in the water."

Fritz ran straight to the well, but the water had frozen over again since noon. He hurried into the sheep-cote,

brought straw to wind round the pump, and went into the kitchen to fetch a burning log out of the stove. They were all sitting there just as they had been when he left. Karl, Gustav and the duck-girls were laughing together. They did not look at him, for none wished to leave the warm room to help him draw water in the icy yard. Fritz seized a glowing pine log, his stiff fingers fastening over the warm wood like hinges, carried it to the well and set fire to the straw. It flamed but went out ; twice he had to try before he could loose the pump-handle and, with infinite trouble, draw two buckets full of water. But he summoned all his will, forced his poor deadened body to act and move.

They sat down to the evening meal shortly after. But Fritz could eat nothing. He dragged himself out of the warm kitchen, unwilling to sit there, and stumbled to his icy room. Like a log, he fell on to the bed, fully-clothed and with his boots on ; the heavy eiderdown, pulled over by the weight of his body, fell upon him.

But his usual profound, dreamless sleep would not come to him. A thin stream of warmth flowed from his breast ; his heart awoke, and at first, as though from a great distance, its beating was faint, soft ; then it beat closer, faster, harder, till it was pounding in his throat, choking him, forcing back his breath. Of a sudden, as though his throat had burst, a torrent of heat surged over his face, his eyes, his neck. The blazing, biting flood devoured his lips, roared in his ears like a great bird flying by, dazzled his eyes with a wounding brilliance that penetrated his closed lids, making them transparent. His breath came in spasms, his lungs, distended by the warmth, half suffocated. He pressed his head deep against his shoulder, seeking relief in its icy coldness, but fresh waves of heat streamed over him again intolerably. Then the icy shell of his body gave way, broken with pain and heat.

For the first time in his life, he dreamed. Until now, he had lain hidden from himself ; but, in this moment, once more desire possessed him, the dark, evil, chaotic desire of

murder and destruction, but pure to him as the natural, sweet flow of youth and strength and joy. He had lost that feeling in the cowshed ; now he recovered it as it streamed forth out of his ardent dream.

Flames burned through his head ; he tossed it from side to side on the pillow to escape their blaze, but his body lay motionless, in helpless rigidity. His heart raced on, wildly. He dreamed that a warm, soft moisture filled his hands, weighing them down ; the ground seemed to melt under his feet, as he sank without a struggle downward, as though from an immense height. Then his feet met water, which spread about him in cold, black, slimy waves. His head and breast still clear of the water, he felt himself enveloped in a dazzling, burning heat that pierced him with keen darts of pain ; but his feet pressed ever downward through the cooling black pool, drawing him implacably into its oozy darkness. With his arms close to his sides, he pressed his folded hands against his body, deep down between the thighs. Wild pain leaped up under his touch ; Fritz pressed the harder, sinking, as he did so, faster and deeper into the cool swamp that rose slowly to his feet and flowed gurgling against his finger-tips. Suddenly, then, it came up over his hands ; he spread them apart ; they filled with the heavy black coldness of the slimy water. Now he was caught in the morass.

All at once life came back to him ; the calm beat of his pulse animated his body ; his heart answered furiously. Shapes rose before him, hopping creatures like frogs that jumped out of his slime-filled hands with gliding hops. They squatted for a moment on the dark waves, swelling out their soft bodies, before they sank out of sight, the dull shine of their eyes vanishing last. Then all he knew was the vast, moving swamp. He tried to raise his hands to his breast that still held clear in the burning heat, wishing to lay their coolness against his racing heart ; but he only sank deeper into the swamp. He found that he had dissolved into slime up to his hips, had become one with it ; now the frog-like animals came up again out of what had been his hands.

A knife-thrust seemed to pierce his heart, he tore his hands away and swung them clenched high in the air, raising his head to meet them. Light fell upon him from above ; the blood poured from his raised fists over his eyes and mouth, over his throat and breast. It washed about his heart and passed over his body in a molten stream. The cool, slimy water had oozed away.

He dreamed he bent down and with his hands dug a trench in the ground to hide the blood. He scooped and covered hole after hole, but the blood kept running from him, making new traces which he would have to bury continually. Suddenly the master came striding across the yard ; Fritz dreamed that he fled before him to the pond, which lay before him glistening and still as metal. He dashed past high piles of reeds which tore at his legs as he passed, spurring his pain and fury ; seized one of the willow-twigs, bending it together. Suddenly it snapped in his hand. Little Anna appeared laughing ; her open mouth showed pink, moist ; she crept up him and sat on his hands. He felt her cool, soft flesh ; he threw himself upon her and they fell together into the pond. But the water did not give way, it received them on its burning, smooth surface. The child under him was no longer there ; he could not sink into the water ; he lay tossing on the hot resistant pond.

He awoke with a start. Surely, he had seen the child ? But she had been gone so long ; everyone had looked for her, nobody had found her. Had he not set everything right ? Could he have forgotten something ?

He tried to rise and run out into the yard but his body would not move. A burning agony racked him. His mother must carry him away from there, he thought ; she must come and lift him up and hold him tight in her arms ; she must wash the ooze and blood from his body ; she must make him well, for he could not help himself now. Then everything would be right again.

The next morning he could not get up. He could move no part of him ; even his head, when he tried to raise it, fell back heavily on the pillow. The eldest of the milkmaids,

finding the cowshed still closed, hurried to wake him. He did not hear her. Then, as she brought a light, she saw him lying there in fever, his face discoloured and swollen. She called Emma, who ran up breathless.

"What is the matter?" she asked him, shocked at his appearance. "Are you in pain?"

Fritz made no answer: he had not even heard her.

She tried to undress him but his feet were so swollen with the cold that she could not remove his boots.

"What is the matter with you?" she said again. "You're not sick, why did you go to bed with your clothes on?"

As he still made no answer, she grew afraid. Suddenly she remembered the terrible illness that had seized him in childhood, immediately after his only meeting with his father. She took up a candle and held it over his face, but his was no evil, diabolic expression such as he had worn on that occasion when she had shrunk from him in terror. His cheeks were red and burning with fever, but his face was that of the Fritz she loved. She fetched a knife from the kitchen, slit his boots and pulled them carefully off his feet; she had to cut the stockings away, as well. They were wet with blood. At the sight, her fear returned. Gently she undressed him, searching for some wound; but the room was dark, icy; she wrapped a blanket about him, picked him up in her arms as though he were a babe and ran with him to her own room, where she laid him on her bed. It was warmer here because the kitchen was next door. She brought in some snow which she rubbed over his frozen feet, then she washed them in warm water with a soft, clean cloth. With the easy, skilful care of a mother, she unwrapped the blanket and put his shirt on him in order to find his wound. There was a large bruise, black with clotted blood, torn in the middle and still bleeding on the groin; here the horse's hoof had struck him. Fritz moaned with pain; Emma moved away from him. Her hands fell to her side; the blood rose to her face; fear gripped her heart. The child her mother's arm had lifted

up and borne here was no longer a child ; a man in his nakedness lay stretched out before her, recalling, in sex, the hideous memory of that other whose brutal lust had ravished her and laid this child within her womb. She hid her eyes ; it seemed to her as though her child had died, and a sense of bereavement struggled against her fear, a feeling of love against the hatred she bore him, her own son. At times, his pitiful moaning reached her above the turmoil in her brain ; she thought of calling the master to help her. But she was ashamed ; she would not suffer anyone to see her child in this hideous condition. Summoning all her self-control, she forced herself to wash his wound ; then, having spread a cool ointment over it and bound it with linen, she covered him. Every half-hour, she rubbed his feet with fresh snow, until at last their numbness seemed to yield somewhat, and life and warmth began slowly to return. His hands were cracked with frost ; they had bled much. She wrapped them in oil-soaked cloths and fed him with hot milk from a spoon. As soon as her work was done at night, she lit a little oil-lamp and sat down to watch beside him. Her sad eyes searched his face : it was still her child's, pure and angelically sweet ; but it would fade from her gaze until she saw only the body of that evil man lying there, mysterious and menacing. In terror and revulsion, she sprang up from her chair ; but immediately after, she reproached herself and grew calm. This was her son, a poor sick helpless boy, feverish and wounded, her own Fritz, a good lad now grown up, the only one of all who, living through these dreadful months, had remained as innocent, as hardworking and as serene as before. He would become a good and affectionate husband when the time came, like the master himself, and a loving father, sacrificing himself for his children. He would take his wife in his arms in the darkness of night, press her to his heart, sink with her gently into their love's fulfilment. Life had denied her this, giving her to his father instead, to a savage fearsome man whom Fritz had loathed instinctively on that only meeting when he was little more than an infant.

Furiously, he had bitten the man's hand. No, his father's evil, bestial blood did not run through his veins.

Thus Emma defended her son against herself as she nursed him, changing the hot bricks at his feet and forcing herself to wash his wound. Fritz did not stir : she could not tell whether he slept or not, whether he could hear or feel her about him. She would gladly have lain down beside him at night but she did not dare. Instead, tired as she was, she set two chairs close to the kitchen wall for warmth, and strove her best to sleep with the nightlight burning, wrapped in such clothes and covering as she could find.

She hurried through her morning work, then went upstairs to Fritz, turning the door-knob noiselessly and peeping anxiously in. He was asleep. She went nearer, heard his deep, quiet breathing. His head was bent over towards his shoulder ; his fair hair fell over his forehead like a child's unruly curls ; he lay on his cheek, his mouth and chin hidden in the soft pillow, looking very white and frail. When she called him softly, he did not hear. She took her hand away from the cover, thinking it better not to disturb him : his fever seemed to have passed ; soon the wound would heal too. At dinner-time when she brought him some soup, he was awake. He smiled at her. Emma caught his head impulsively in her arms and pressed it to her heart.

They drank their soup together, smiling often yet neither speaking a word. Fritz tried to get up but his bruise was too painful, his swollen feet would not fit into his shoes. But from then on, he himself dressed his wound. At the master's orders, she slept in the little guest-room now ; gradually she forgot to feel fearful and ashamed before her son.

Within a week, Fritz was able to walk about the house with the help of a stick and to sleep in his own room again. He woke early and went eagerly to his work, limping to the stables, his leg still stiff and painful. He found that Anton, the youngest hand but himself, had been there before him and that all his work was already done. Trembling with anger and jealousy, he approached the other lad

who was standing beside a manger, feeding with hay the restive horses. Fritz dug his elbow into the other's ribs, trying to push him away ; but Anton, powerful and sinewy, only strewed the manger full and laughed good-naturedly.

" That's all right, Pretty Miss," he said, using the nick-name Fritz had been given at Treuen because of his clear treble voice and his gentle ways, " don't you bother about this. You've been hurt, old fellow ; don't you know that ? "

And he passed further into the stable, to fetch some fresh hay from a shelf in the corner, which Fritz had made with his own hands and which held a week's store of fodder for his horses. Fritz watched him go. Then suddenly he lifted his heavy, iron-pointed stick and hurled it with terrific force at Anton's head. Fortunately, Anton had just turned with his load, so that the missile flew past his head and broke into bits against the wall, showering a spray of fragments over the horses. Fritz was panting with anger and fear. The other boy looked up ; only when he saw Fritz's face, distorted with rage, he realised what his intention had been.

" Well, I'll be hanged ! " he said, as he let the hay fall and advanced slowly towards Fritz. " Gone mad, have you ? Don't know what a man is, eh, Pretty Miss ? Trying to start trouble with me, eh ? Go and practise on someone your own size ; there's plenty of girls here for you."

And, still laughing, he pushed Fritz out and shut the door. His whole body quivering, Fritz ran to his room and crouched in his bed, burying himself in the blankets, staying there motionless all morning long and refusing to go down to breakfast. Towards noon he knocked at the master's door, entered without greeting :

" I want to go away," he said, " there's no work for me here any more."

" What about the work you have always done ? " Christian asked in astonishment.

" It's Anton's now."

" He did it while you were ill. He'll give it back to you again."

" No, it's not my work any more. I want to leave here ! "

" What ! Leave your mother ? "

" I want to leave," Fritz repeated.

Christian looked at him as he stood there before him, took in his young figure and his child's face, recalled how he had grown up in his house like his own son. He pondered how he meant to send the other two away, to save them from the fate that hung over them still ; but this boy he had forgotten. Yes, he should go too ; there was no place here for youth.

" Where would you like to go ? "

" To look after horses."

" Very well, if you really want to leave me, I'll look about for a new place for you. But wait till your leg is well ! "

" Thank you, Master."

Bad days followed for Fritz, since there was no work for him to do. He never once returned to the stables since the other had taken " his " work away from him ; he would lurk in some corner for hours together, sullen and idle ; his mother could seldom find him to help her in the kitchen. She began to worry about him, could no longer close her eyes to his strangeness ; every day he seemed less like the child she knew ; all her fears returned to her. When the master talked to her about him, told her he was sending his own boys away that spring, and urged that it was best for all three children to leave Treuen, she was convinced that she was losing her boy for ever.

" Now the curse is striking me ! " she said.

" Don't look at it that way, Emma. God forbid that any trouble should fall upon you. But let him go ! This is not a cheerful house for children."

Accordingly, it was settled that the master would look about for a new place for him.

About the middle of February, after four long weeks, the severest cold abated. The faintly vaporous air grew warmer ; ice melted off the roofs and thawed away at the well, the ground, frozen hard as steel, grew soft again.

They could open the hen-coop at noon now ; the dazed fowl came tumbling out unsteadily into the brisk air and dazzling light. All the animals had suffered severely from the rigours of winter ; the young ones' growth was stunted, lice had eaten away at the fowls' feathers, mange lay in crusts over their legs and spurs. Two horses, among the strongest and most powerful, could no longer eat : one had consumption, the other had been poisoned by an abscess in his ear formed by the cold. Both had to be shot. Four two-year-old mares had to be turned over to the veterinary ; among the cattle, there was much sickness. After three weeks of sunshine, they could finally dig up the potatoes ; three quarters of the crop were frozen. The other vegetables were rotten, too, fit only to feed the pigs. The great thaw set in at the end of February. They barely managed to protect the house and sheds from inundation as the huge masses of snow melted and flowed down upon them. By the beginning of March, all traces of snow had gone from the fields ; spring came so quickly that overnight the blades of winter rye sprang up a hand tall. But the deer, half-famished in the woods, came out and attacked the sprouting crop, venturing far into the fields, and although the steward shot down a few of them at night, every morning he found large new patches where the starving creatures had eaten away the rye clear to the ground. The March sun shone warmly upon them ; the days were mild as early summer. Warmth and moisture rose vaporous out of the earth ; the clear, fresh air intoxicated everyone after the bitter cold at Treuen ; to a man they crowded into the sunshine, as joyful as children, with jests and games and wild embraces that seemed to threaten the order and decorum of life on the farm.

They cleared and repaired stables and sheds ; the flow of melted snows was diverted and the yard cleared of ice ; its wide old cement flags gleamed in the sun, washed and refurbished. For two months, the farm had been completely cut off from the rest of the world, first because of the cold, then because fathomless swamps had made the roads

impassable. No one had been able to go either to market or to church ; no one had visited the dead in the churchyard, nor had any of the neighbours called at Treuen. Karl and Gustav were to leave soon ; great preparations were being made. Two handsome wooden chests, made, painted and carved at Treuen, bearing locks forged by Christian's smith, were filled with suits and linen. One Sunday Christian took the boys into his room and discussed the future with them, gave them advice about the new life they would lead in town, advised them about what they must attend to or ignore. He told them how to employ their money, warned them to keep their eyes and ears open, to look out for some calling which might prove more attractive than farming, promised them freedom of choice and assured them that he was prepared to help them with every means in his power. As he spoke, he scanned their young faces ; carefully, with the most skilful words, probed deep into their minds ; ascertained that the tragedy that had befallen their family had not been too great for them to bear and that the even tenor of their lives still persisted. He perceived this with profound relief ; it strengthened his determination to send them away and to manage their schooling, however difficult he might find it in his altered circumstances. Indeed, a strange impatience made him long for the day of parting.

The roads were scarcely dry when he drove into town to make the final purchases for them. This time he remembered Fritz as well and was able to find the lad a place as driver and groom with Mandelkov, a town magistrate in Plestlin, whom he met one day at the cattle market. That evening, when all these things were done, he walked through the dusk to the churchyard. The sun had shone warmly the whole day ; the earth, dark and soft, distilled a mild warmth in the evening air like the breath of tired satiety. Amid the graves, there was a strange invisible stirring, a moving to and fro to a mysterious rhythm ; obscure life forces were at work again among the dead. Christian strode by the graves, his grief lying cold upon

him. Inconsolable, implacable towards himself, he had given himself up to a relentless God until the last human force in him was spent. He believed he had suffered all that a man could suffer, yet the limit had appeared as a beginning ; the thin ray of light that had seemed to beckon him had been snuffed out. As he wandered among the graves in search of Martha's, he felt that evil threatened him again, not from God, but from the Devil. He hastened past the old graves to the fresh ones, where lay the newly dead ; but the hard winter had marred the freshness of these mounds, laying waste their flowers ; as the headstones had not yet been set up, he could not distinguish his wife's grave in the gathering shadows. He had brought with him a wreath of immortelles ; he laid it on a small, fresh mound, then walked back to town and drove home.

At the beginning of April, the young people left. Karl and Gustav sat in the carriage with their father, their luggage piled up behind them ; Fritz drove the Treuen horses for the last time. He too had his luggage beside him on the box ; it was a large bundle tied up in stout, brand-new cords and containing new clothes and garments made for him to go away with. The master had given him his linen, a pair of boots, a cap and a jacket, together with three new shiny five-mark pieces for good measure. Karl and Gustav moved about sadly, taking leave of everyone in turn and drawing long faces ; Fritz whistled and sang all morning long, combed out his horses until their manes shone, attended to the carriage and paid no attention to anyone. Meanwhile his mother, filled with anxiety, avoided meeting him, though she longed to talk to him, to banish for ever her dread that had stood like a wall between them, to take him in her arms and know him as blood of her blood, flesh of her flesh. She longed, too, to warn him to do no wrong and to turn a deaf ear when the older hands spoke of evil, to think of every girl as he thought of his mother, nor ever forget God and His commandments. Yet always when she found herself alone with him, the words refused to come ;

she would sit before him and look down, shame bringing a flush to her cheeks and choking her thoughts. As the time of his departure drew near, she was desperate ; it drove her mad to lose all three children at once. The day before he left, she spent a sleepless night, weeping and praying for her little ones, the memory of Anna and Martha filling her with new anguish. All the old suffering awoke in her afresh, storming her heart with a grief too poignant to bear. When morning came, she was scarce able to watch the preparations for their journey. She shuffled about her work, pale and distraught ; before she could collect her thoughts and rush out to take leave of them, the carriage was already at the door, loaded with the baggage and passengers, Fritz was cracking his whip and calling good-bye through the kitchen window.

" Emma ! Emma ! " Karl cried, jumping down from the carriage to run into her arms and sob upon her shoulder like a child. Emma was beyond speech. She embraced Gustav, kissed his soft childish mouth as he bent down from his seat towards her, then she went towards Fritz.

Then, a terrible thing happened. Her emotion was checked at its source ; an icy chill gripped her heart. She could move no farther : her arms, raised towards him, fell helpless to her sides. She looked up, saw him sitting there on the box, sturdy, strong, man-like yet with the face of a boy, a boy's triumphant smile hovering on his lips. Yet she could not embrace him ; she was without feeling, without thought, her face ashen. She gazed at him intently ; her lips moved painfully ; she heard herself saying : " Don't do any wrong. Never ! Never do anything that's wrong."

Fritz smiled in embarrassment. He, too, would have wished to throw his arms about her, yet he dared not approach her as she stood so stiff, so pale, below him.

" Good-bye, mother," he said softly, his voice poignant as ever. " I'll be coming to see you soon."

Emma nodded. He gave a pull at the reins, clicked his tongue and drove out of the yard, serenely calm. Dry-eyed, Emma stood looking after him until the carriage was out

of sight. Then she turned and dragged her heavy body wearily back to the house.

Life at the farm seemed to move more calmly after that. Something of the old order and regularity came back as a consolation for the sorrow at the departure of the boys. That sense of peace came chiefly from Christian. All his former energy returned to him ; once more he attended to every detail of the farm routine.

Yet nothing prospered, nothing flourished as before. An epidemic struck the cattle that had once been the pride of Treuen ; they fell, one by one, before help could reach them. Almost every day the big wagon had to be harnessed to take dead animals to the knacker's yard in town. As the heat and drought continued, with never a rain or frost, quarters for the cattle could be built up hurriedly while the old sheds were being burned out with sulphur, the walls freshly whitewashed and the mud floors repaired. But no sooner was this done and the epidemic checked, than one of the finest of the stud horses, severely hurt, had to be shot. The sheep alone throve in spite of everything.

Their thick, long wool promised a good shearing. The unusually early heat brought out the crops far before their time ; the winter rye had scarcely begun to sprout before it stood two feet high and almost ready to mow, although they had not yet finished manuring and sowing the other fields. By Easter, the trees were in full bloom ; and still no rain fell ; by the beginning of May, it was already as hot as in other years at harvest time. As the rain held off all through May, the water in the irrigation-brook fell lower and lower, until it amounted to scarcely more than a trickle, and the fields began to dry. Even the pond sank daily. The yield of the farm was fifty per cent. less than the previous year, yet interest had to be paid on loans, school fees and maintenance provided for the children in town, and new funds continually supplied for the search for the lost child. Somehow or other, cash must be found ; once again, they sold the cattle for slaughter and the trees for timber to the limit, as provided for in Christian's lease. Work went

on as before ; the house and farm servants had forgotten the past ; they laughed, rested and rejoiced as in the early days. Their work was paid, but its yield dissipated.

But only the master noticed this, as he tried to prevent it, to keep everything well in hand, to spare neither labour nor pains for the sake of the children. From morning to night, he worked with the others. He had grown thin ; his face, tanned and weatherbeaten under his white hair, wore a gaunt look. He saw no one, gave up going to church, abandoned the care of his wife's grave to Emma and Klara. As the heat and drought continued into June, it grew clear that the harvests in the region would be poor that year.

" A straw crop, Master," Blank said, pointing sadly to the vast drab fields and the wasted, brown, parched meadows.

Christian was thinking that he had once considered buying Treuen and that this autumn he would scarcely be able to pay the rent. It grew more difficult than ever to water the animals, as the drought dried up the streams ; the pools were stagnant now, with only a brackish slime upon them ; the well threatened to give out ; water had to be fetched in huge vats out of the forest, where a hidden spring still flowed. By the end of June, the drought had exhausted men, animals and plants. The return of laughter and cheer had not withstood the season ; in the evening, they would all lie about the staircase which led down to the cellars, enjoying the chill of the only cool spot on the farm. Christian alone did not suffer, for the numbness that possessed his soul possessed his body also. He worked on tirelessly from morning to night ; his chief worry was lest fire might break out in the stables or in the outbuildings, that were filled with dry grain.

It was now time for Christian to deliver the previous year's harvest, which he had sold in advance. This debt meant a great loss for him, since last year's prices had been low, while now, because of the poor crops, the price of grain had soared. Early in June, he opened Barn 4, intending to thresh the rye stored there first. This duty fell to Anton,

who had inherited Fritz's place, to four workmen and to Paula, a young maid who was to pass the men the sheaves and untie them. Because of the intense heat, they were to work from three till eight in the morning, and again at night, from eight till ten.

In the grey dawn, the six set out across the yard with the steward to open the door of the barn. Stillness lay all about them ; the birds slept ; a few dim stars lay scattered in the silvery sky. The steward picked the key from his heavy bunch and opened the padlock, which riveted the heavy latch to the wall ; as he did so, he remembered how difficult it had been to pull the door to that summer. His wrinkled peasant's face drew into a smile as he said :

" We won't need the oxen to get it open."

As they moved the bar away and pulled ever so slightly at the edges, where the two halves joined, suddenly the door flew open violently, flinging young Anton on the ground, then swung back again, where, quivering on its hinges, it hung still. It seemed to them all as though within some invisible power lay in wait and gathered its tremendous force to burst open the doors. With some hesitancy, they now pushed back each side against the wall and entered. A space of about three square yards had been left clear for the threshing ; round it rose the walls of sheaves. A suffocating air of heat, of parched straw and of must passed out into the summer morning, already hot before sunrise. The men's breath came heavily as they seized their flails and Paula loosed the first sheaf. The steward turned back into the yard with relief. A moment after, the familiar beat of the flails, in slow steady rhythm, rang through the air. It was to sound for many days to follow.

Anna's birthday came round again. It was Saturday ; the master had given them the afternoon off. The heat proved no less oppressive than the memory of the child's fate. Klara had driven over at noon to be with her brother ; she had persuaded him to go home that day with her. Christian hoped to drown his memories in the emptiness of his heart ; but now dread seized him once more, driving

him to flight. He summoned Blank and Emma to the parlour, ordering them all to drive to church on the morrow and allowing those who wished to stay away that afternoon. He also gave them a little money to distribute among the household. He urged Emma to make sure that the fire in the kitchen be put out after dinner and not lighted that evening. They could do with bread and cold milk for supper.

Since the children's departure, Emma had changed greatly. Now she turned pale and trembled with fear, raising her flickering eyes to her master's face :

" Don't go away, Master," she implored, " these are bad days and I'm afraid. Stay here Master, stay here with us."

With a gesture of despair, she covered her face with her hands.

Christian listened in dismay as he looked at her, uncertain whether to go or stay. But Klara intervened.

" What's the matter, Emma ? " she said. " Do you miss your boy so much ? You want him back, is that it ? "

Emma let her hands fall. With a kind of desperate agitation, as though she sought to flee from herself, Emma's glances roved about the room.

" No, madam, I don't know what it is. No, I don't want him. But I'm frightened. Oh dear, madam, you know how children leave us twice : the first time when they're born, the second when they're wicked. Ay, then they go out of our hearts ! And that's when their mothers don't want to see them ever again."

" It's a sin to talk like that ! " Klara said, horrified. " What has your Fritz ever done ? "

" Nothing, madam, nothing. Oh, but dear madam, it's better not to have children."

Klara shook her by the shoulders.

" Whatever has come over you, Emma ? Tell me : you can trust me, you know. Wasn't I with you when he came ? You remember ! Tell me what's the matter ? "

" Nothing, nothing. He's a good boy," Emma said. " He does his work, he has a good heart ! It's all me."

" It's a sin to talk like that," Klara repeated.

" You've none of your own ; you don't know what awful things can happen."

The blood rushed to her cheeks, she turned to the door.

" Please come with me, Master ; I'll need fat and flour from the pantry over Sunday."

And as Christian followed her, she kept steadily in front of him, refusing to show her face even though they talked together for a long time.

Her distraught manner affected Christian deeply. He could not understand why his suffering should have visited his faithful servant ; he would gladly have stayed behind for her sake. But as he stood beside her in the sunny kitchen, as he noted the crimson juice of the berries bubbling on the stove, just as on that former occasion, the memory of his wife and child appeared to him as he had seen them that last day, swinging round and round, playing together so delightfully, their laughter mingling, indescribably sweet. Again, he surrendered to the strange power driving him to flight. Hasty and impatient as he had never been before, he ordered the carriage, and waited feverishly until it was time for him to set out. Within half an hour, he had driven away with his sister.

When he was gone, they all sat about on the cool stone verandah and on the top steps of the cellar stair. For the first time in many a month, they spoke of Anna, but always as though she had long been dead, murdered by the gipsies. The women wished to hear how and where the child had been buried ; they refused to believe the child had never been found and they began to sob. The men, apparently unmoved, discussed whether the master was entitled to compensation from the state, since the courts had abandoned the case as hopeless, although witnesses and circumstances enough had shown that the child was stolen by the gipsies. And they called upon one another to witness how this fine farm was going steadily to rack and ruin—and was it not a scandal and shame for the whole country that the child of a gentleman and a taxpaying farmer could simply vanish from the earth and nothing be done about it?

"The master is too good," said Blank. "He'd have given the shirt off his back to get the child back again."

They all nodded silently. Emma came with supper. A great pail of sour milk, mugs for everyone, and slices of bread. She sat down amongst them. Nobody at Treuen that night wished to be alone.

"Things are good here!" she said, "we have a fine master. He never deserved the like of this."

They all nodded again; for a while all were silent. Then suddenly the hoarse voice of an old man rang across the evening air. The speaker was an aged day-labourer who had come to Treuen begging for work a short while ago; Christian had taken him in, giving him food and shelter in return for what service his feeble hands might render. Indeed, he was so weak that he could only just raise his mug to his mouth; now he set it down again, trembling.

"Nothing can vanish from the earth like that," he said, fixing his dim small eyes on space. "What was on earth shall return to earth."

They tried to laugh away the fear his words inspired. Anton shouted into his ear:

"Not if it's dead, it can't."

"Dead?" said the old man. He shook his head, made a defensive gesture and fell silent; the others were likewise silent; they were having no joy of their holiday. At last the heavy, blistering sun sank in the west and they crawled wearily out to settle the animals for the night and to prepare their clothes and shoes for church on the morrow.

Emma spent all day Sunday in the house with one of the older maids. Her anxiety drove her from room to room; then suddenly her strength would fail, she would practically collapse until, as suddenly again, she felt herself goaded into distracted wandering. She tidied the empty, tidy rooms, opened windows and shut them again, inspected the sheds, and stood shading her eyes with her hands, searching the barns, gardens and fields for something, she knew not what. But all lay still and withered, dead in the burning heat. She remembered how, at this same time the

year before, she had searched for the lost child, calling for her everywhere, coaxing ; and all at once the shimmering silence seemed alive with the faint sound of a child's long-drawn whimper, together with soft, high laughter which seemed to quiver shrilly in the quivering heat, now mingling with the child's weeping, now resounding alone, clear and louder.

Emma rushed back to the house. She had been standing in the full glare of the sun but she was pale and cold. She pressed her forehead against the wall, clutched at her tortured heart. From her place on the cool stone floor, the maid looked up at her.

" Do you hear it ? " Emma asked at last with a vast effort.

" No," the maid said calmly.

At the sound of her voice, the crying ceased.

" I heard it in the air . . . a sound of crying and laughter ! " Emma insisted.

" It's your age," the other answered, " you're having the change of life."

" No, I'm still too young for that. No : I tell you I'm frightened, I'm frightened all the time."

" It comes sooner to some than others. How old were you when it started ? "

" That's not it, I tell you," Emma said. " It's to-day my troubles began."

" You can't go on mourning for ever ; you must live, so long as God lets you. Some die, others go on living. Though it's different with that child too . . . no grave or anything ! She would have been five years old to-day."

" The laughter was more horrible than the crying. Clearer too," Emma said, still dazed.

" There's something about this house," the old maid answered, " I feel it too. The mistress did wrong when she carried that crib upstairs on Christmas day, and she hardly up from the sick-bed. But punishments come too hard sometimes. The master's a good man. But the house has been queer since."

Just as the last of the churchgoers returned, suddenly, as though from nowhere, black clouds lowered in a sky which had so long flared white in the unendurable brilliance of the sun. The air turned sultry and suffocating ; a dry vapour arose that caught the throat sharply like smoke. The evening fell swiftly in a wan and sallow twilight, though it was hardly seven o'clock. The household sat about the table at supper, some loud and in high good humour, some still fuddled with liquor they had drunk in town, others with kisses exchanged in the green shimmering depths of the woods where a spring still bubbled amid the parched, dead plants. But all were exhausted from the heat of the day. The storm hung directly overhead in the sky now, still and menacing. There was no flash of lightning, no thunder, no breeze stirring, no rain : darkness and silence alone were there ; the world had ceased to breathe. They looked at each other's faces, livid in the strange light ; slowly, one by one, they left the table. For a long time nobody spoke. It grew darker ; soon they could distinguish nothing in the kitchen ; outside, the landscape was shrouded in blackness. All they could see between them and that darkness was a space of a hundred yards, in which lay a strip of meadow, the well in the yard, and, in a pale yellowish light, Barn 4, with its door wide open.

Now the wind began to circle the house, pushing against the windows with a soft, gliding movement ; it rustled in the dried branches of the trees. A door banged somewhere in the house. Suddenly they heard the cattle lowing out in the meadows. Then all was still again. Once more the rustling began as the hot, heavy wind rose, bearing along dust, parched earth and leaves, scorched brown and prematurely fallen from the brittle branches. In the house, all waited for the first lightning and thunder ; the women with folded hands, the men with bowed heads. The storm promised to be violent after the heat and drought. But the stillness held, the wind rustled round the house, night fell with a smell of sulphur and fire.

" Light the light, Emma, do," Minna, the little

duck-girl screamed through the silence, her voice trembling with fear.

" Lord have mercy on the girl," said Blank. " Don't you know that the whole place would go up like tinder in this wind ? Nothing could put it out."

" No lights," Emma agreed. " The master said not."

They were all silent again.

" I never knew a storm like this in my life. You can't even breathe," Blank said.

They all gasped, oppressed.

" The drought lasted too long, that's all," Anton explained, trying to make a joke of it. " So now we must stay locked up in the dark even though it's broad daylight, like bad children shut up in a cellar ! " But nobody laughed.

" Maybe it'll rain soon," said another.

" This storm's not going to break," Blank answered.

They could not see each other's faces but their voices betrayed their fear. Their deep breathing soughed through the silence. The little duck-girl, clinging to Emma, prayed under her breath ; the others listened, hearing an echo now and again across the rustling wind. The women's lips moved as they repeated the words noiselessly ; the men's heads sank lower. They sat thus for fully an hour. Occasionally someone would try to begin a conversation, but, unencouraged, relapse into silence. Their minds were fixed upon one thing only : the first clap of thunder or cloudburst.

" Well," Blank said at last, " somebody'll have to go and bring in the cows."

" Why can't Gahl go ? " Anton objected. But no one wanted to go.

Suddenly, out of the heavy darkness, a dog began to bark ; then the cattle lowed and the sheep bleated ; there was a sound of galloping hoof-beats and the rumbling of wheels.

" It's a carriage ! " Emma cried, rushing out. " The master's come home."

In the wan twilight which now reigned outside, the animals came running like grey shadows towards the yard. They pushed against one another, the horses stamped and shied at the stables, the oxen lowered their heads, their horns menacing. Gahl, the herdsman, took charge of the trap while the master, dismounting, swung his long whip about him, driving the frenzied animals together, clinging to the necks of the bucking horses, forcing them back into the stable, where they stood quietly and neighed. Encouraged by the mere presence of the master, the others now came hurrying up ; amid a great din, the frightened animals were at last shut in. The wind still whistled about the house, the hot dry air choked the breath in their throats. Panting, drenched with sweat, they all returned to the yard. The master, calm and silent, struck a match and lit the lamp which burned with a dim, pallid flame, as though the very air were poisoned and dead. It wavered in the sultry rustling wind and hung there, its pale uncanny glimmer surrounded by a darkness which it could not pierce. The strong brown faces paled in its strange rays ; bright hair lost its colour ; wide eyes looked like cavernous holes filled with shadows.

The master filled a mug of milk and emptied it at a draught. His agitation was spent ; now he had himself well in hand. That day Nature had appeared to him as never before. He had cut short his visit at Klara's house in order to reach home before the storm, which they had seen gathering on the horizon. The grey clouds hung in the distance away behind him as he drove off ; as no storm overtook him, he soon forgot that it had looked threatening ; he even ceased to hope for rain. . . . On every side the fields and meadows lay sere about him under the blinding heat. He had reached the edge of the Treuen land, where the road turned through the woods, when suddenly a cold breeze struck him from behind and scalding raindrops fell upon his neck. He turned. A towering wall of cloud, black as night, seemed to lean down from its vast height about to hurl itself down upon him. It approached him with

incredible speed, with a low murmur of thunder and incessant flashes of lightning. Hot raindrops sprayed from it, dropped to the ground like stones ; but in front of him the sun was shining.

He urged his horse on and turned into the forest. Here all was very still ; it was as though the sun had suddenly gone out. A yellow sky glimmered through the emerald crests of the trees. It took him only a short time to cross the forest, but, just as he reached its edge, his horse grew restive, shied and would go no further.

Treuen lay before them, lost in a sea of black clouds that whirled with a continually circular motion, now mingling, now parting, gathering into ragged clumps of darkness, rising and falling. Where the whirling mass hung thickest the earth below was wrapped in complete darkness, but its drooping edges gave forth a yellowish sickly light which cast a wan reflection below. The light came from the opposite horizon, now at Christian's back, where the sky spread clear and empty, golden in the radiance of sunset.

Christian had to dismount and lead the frightened horse forward into the darkness of the cloudy turmoil. The sultry rustling wind now curled about them too ; the air weighed down on them with its sulphurous breath ; there was no lightning, no rain. Clearly defined, motionless within the centre of the rushing whirlpool of wind, the storm surrounded the house, yard and fields of Treuen. Christian neither heard nor saw a sign of any bird, but among the dry stalks covering his thirsting acres, he discerned the infinite stir of multitudes of field-mice. During the drought, they had bred profusely ; now, in the sudden extinction of day, their tiny bodies and beady eyes darted ceaselessly in and out in the dim, unnatural half-light.

Christian came to the paddock where he found the animals in wild confusion, too far gone to heed the cries of the herdsman, who had just come up and was trying to drive them into some kind of order. The master, the herdsman, his boy and the sheepdog were barely able to keep them together and drive them to the sheds. They

passed into the storm cloud ; it closed about them. The bright evening sky had vanished.

" It isn't going to burst," said the herdsman, as he returned to the kitchen, " it's right on top of us and the sun's still out beyond it ; but it won't burst."

" They say they often have storms like this in the mountains," Christian said with perfect calm.

" Ay, but not hereabouts," Emma contradicted him. " Something's not right. The storm is choking us ; it was sent for a purpose."

" Emma's getting to be a perfect old woman, always afraid of something," Anton said. Some of the others tried to laugh. Suddenly the sound of snoring came from a corner, first softly, then louder and longer ; it was the old day-labourer, who had fallen asleep there. Now all of them laughed. Some of the cotters ventured to make off ; the maids jumped to their feet, the men following slowly. It was nine o'clock and pitch dark ; but they lit no lamps. All went to bed in the dark and, in spite of the oppressive air, soon fell asleep ; their stalwart bodies lay at rest, but not in their usual unruffled slumber. The sounds of men groaning and women moaning in nightmare, the creak of their beds as they tossed about uneasily, passed from room to room.

By midnight, all was still pitch black, with neither sky nor earth visible, and the storm hovering over them, dark as the night itself, weighing down upon them, unheard and unseen, terrible. The lamp in the kitchen still burned, its fluttering, dim flame half choked by the sulphurous vapour in the air ; the rustling wind beat with hot gusts against the half-open windows. Neither Emma nor the master had gone to bed.

Christian sat at the head of the table in the kitchen, his white head between his hands, his fingers covering his heavy eyes and his wide clear brow. Emma sat facing him, a bowl of berries, which she was picking over, on her knees. Her hands trembled ; every now and then she paused to draw a long, deep breath and hold it, throwing back her

head ; then, as she exhaled, in a low sigh, her head drooped mournfully over her work again. She could not breathe naturally ; something seemed to press her chest together. It was the evil fate, waiting to strike her, ready now to crush her in spite of her gentleness and patience, her loyalty, her tireless service to those she loved, in fair weather or foul. She would never be as she had been ; to-night Christian was seeing the old Emma for the last time. Her shining hair lay full and soft about her broad head, neatly parted in the middle and braided back on either side clear to her forehead, which was curved like a child's ; little bright curls framed her face with shimmering gold. In spite of her full bosom, her figure and movements were those of a young girl ; there was something girlish, too, in the gentle shy modesty of this mother who had never loved a man nor known a man's love. In the ominous, dark hour of the storm, a kind of radiance, a tremulous beauty, lay upon her. A soft flush bloomed on her cheeks ; the blue of her eyes, as they gleamed now, turned to a velvet blackness. In the leaden heat and silence, an invisible presence seemed to stand by her. She was conscious of her exaltation ; it frightened and bewildered her ; she sought refuge in her work. Christian, who had sat gazing at her for a long time and divined what was passing through her mind, said :

" Won't you stop work now, Emma ? It's twelve o'clock."

" I cannot go to bed, Master," she answered, " it is too hot."

Neither spoke. Christian shut his eyes again under his folded hands and felt the pulse of wrist and temple beating together.

" Life goes on . . ." he was thinking, while behind his wakeful eyes lay darkness : bottomless and infinite, beyond the boundless flight of thought, uncapturable save as the element in which his soul sank ever deeper. All that had made up his human life—memory, happiness, suffering and prayer—had been destroyed. He felt lost in a vast nothingness ; for a second he seemed to die. But infinity

passed away ; and his first thought came winging back to him, as though from horizons infinitely remote.

" This is death ! " he thought, and the conception brought life back : he felt his breath stir ; the darkness grew brighter ; in the twilight, memory returned. He saw the dry, livid earth, riddled with tiny holes, like a vast sieve, the grey, small mice slipping through them by the thousand ; he saw his house, rising before him amid the black clouds. The hot sun burned his neck. He relaxed the pressure of his hands, opened his eyes and saw Emma's radiant countenance. He rose, moved to the window, sought the sky, but sky and earth were one, a vast, impenetrable darkness.

The storm loomed over Treuen all night without breaking. At about three, Emma fell asleep in her chair. Christian tiptoed to the table and turned out the light. But dawn was more horrible to face than the oppressive darkness of night. A pallid radiance on the edge of the sky thrust its way through the solid cloud-banks, margining them thinly ; the grey earth grew visible. The wind dropped ; a terrible silence fell. Not a cock crew, no bird stirred, no sound came from the cattle sheds. As Christian turned back from the window, his footstep fell with a dull thud, echoing as though across a vast cavern. The heat was suffocating ; the sweat poured over his face. He had meant to go from room to room and wake the household ; but he stood in his tracks, transfixed by the silence. Then he turned to the window and leaned against it. Suddenly sleep overcame him ; he fell asleep where he stood.

When he awoke, the parlour clock was striking seven. The clouds had gone ; a fierce sun filled the white sky. Everything seemed to lie dead in the dazzling heat. His mouth was parched ; he was terribly thirsty ; his tongue almost refused to form the words he spoke as he called Emma to awake her. She opened her eyes with a start, gazed around the bright kitchen.

" The storm is over," Christian said. " It didn't rain after all."

" Look how high the sun is already," she said in dismay. " We all overslept."

Smoothing her hair with her hands, she hurried out to wake the others, for only the stable boys were up. They opened the sheds ; the animals rushed out ; the poultry tumbled in the powdery dust, the sheep crowded to the trough at the well, only to reel with pain as their soft mouths met with dry, burning stone. The shepherd came and drove them away into the pasture, where they could slake their thirst at the hidden spring. A wagon, bearing a barrel to bring back water for the house, followed them. Barefoot, naked under their wide skirts, their white kerchiefs bound around their heads, the little duck-girls ran behind their flocks as the birds, cackling, raced to the half-empty pond and threw themselves into the turbid, shallow water. The well in the yard yielded but a thin trickle. The pigeons flew round the horses as they drank, catching the spraying drops from the animals' mouths before they reached the ground. The scorched brown leaves fell from the trees on the dead grass and the burning grey dust ; the fruit, small and weazen, hung on the bare branches ; the fields, with their tall sparse crops, rustled with the infinite activity of the insects. Far as the eye could reach, the sky was white, quivering with light and heat. A smell of burning hung in the air. Strict orders were given on the farm to prevent the possibility of fire ; the master himself accompanied Blank to the tall haylofts where they turned the hay over, bringing the damp bundles inside to the surface, to prevent combustion.

At ten o'clock, the postman came, bearing good news from Gustav and Karl and inquiries about the newly threshed crop from various jobbers. Feebler than before, yet rhythmical and continuous, the thrashing of the flails echoed across the air from Barn 4.

In the half-darkness of the open barn stood the four threshers, wearing only shirts and trousers, their caps on their heads ; their flails, at wide intervals, rose and fell. Their faces were wet with sweat, dark with the chaff

dust ; their coarse grey linen shirts clung to their wet bodies. They worked mechanically, their eyes swelling in their sockets, their blood moving like piston-rods in their veins, swelling their powerful muscles and the furrows in their sunburned throats. On and on they worked, doggedly, for, heat or frost, there was always work at hand.

Paula, the little maid, worked with them, bringing them the sheaves to thresh ; half the wall of stacked grain was down ; a narrow passage to the right laid bare a deep corner of the barn. She had toiled incessantly, bearing her burden of sheaves to the threshers and back again, reaching down and picking up the heavy loads. Of a sudden, she felt her breast contract painfully ; a slight faintness overcame her. A sharper stab of pain made her bend down ; her hand touched something hard and smooth. As she pulled the straw away, the object shone dimly in the gloom. It was a little human skull. Terrified, the girl stared down at it, unaware what it was, yet spell-bound, unable to move or utter a sound. The rhythmical beat in the barn beyond stopped.

" More sheaves ! " Anton cried. As she made no answer, he looked about him and finally caught sight of her light blouse and white arms in the darkness. Dropping his flail, he went to her and put his arm about her waist.

Paula pushed him away from her and pointed to the ground ; his eyes followed her gesture ; slowly he, too, saw the glimmering object in the dark corner. It looked like a stone ; he put out his foot cautiously and shoved the straw further aside. The little skull lay uncovered before them ; they could see its tiny teeth in the yawning jaws. The girl screamed aloud and hid her face against the wall ; Anton, dumb with horror, stepped back. The girl's scream brought the others ; they too bent down over it and they too sprang back. They fled from the corner, stood in a group in the middle of the barn ; their bodies streaming with sweat, their blood, hot and bursting a moment ago, now frozen within them.

Anton broke the long silence.

" Someone had better fetch the master."

But no one made the move. Anton looked at Paula ; she was leaning against the door, pale and trembling.

" Go and get a mattock," he said, throwing out his chest officiously. " We'll have to see what it is. Perhaps it's an animal."

As Paula fled across the yard, her horror found release in a wild, spasmodic crying.

" Master, Master ! Come to the barn, Master ! Come to Barn 4. Quickly ! Oh, God, oh, God ! "

The master came down with the steward from the loft over the sheep-cote and saw the girl standing in the middle of the yard, pale in the sunlight, pointing frantically. He did not stop to question her but made straight for the barn. Emma came out of the kitchen.

" What's the matter ? " she asked the girl. " What are you screaming like that for ? "

Paula suddenly recovered her senses : " A mattock," she said, " I'm to bring a mattock : there's something buried in the barn."

She put her hand against her side ; Emma saw she was faint.

" Go up to your room," she said gently. " I'll fetch the mattock."

And Emma hurried across to the garden side of the barn, where the tools hung under the eaves ; she was quite calm as she took down the mattock and hastened to the barn. But suddenly, as she entered, swinging the mattock in her hand, the truth came to her in a revelation. No one knew exactly what lay buried in the barn ; but Emma seemed to have become possessed with the power of second sight : the past was quite clear to her. It was the clairvoyance of motherhood, springing out of that mysterious, profound interfusion of the blood that binds the mother to the child that grows in her body, nourishing and being nourished. Now this bond between Emma and her son sprang alive again ; it was as though she still carried him unborn within her, even though she saw him, just as she

had once before, coming to meet her, swinging the mattock in his hand. The innocent smile of a child was on his lips ; then the attractive boyish vision dissolved, and in its place she saw the face of a devil, dark and flushed with blood, distorted and grimacing, with a man's body, in the ghastly nakedness of a stranger, bleeding and covered with black wounds. Her eyes had seen her child, Fritz, in the doorway of the barn ; now her heart saw Fritz, the murderer.

She flung herself blindly towards the corner where the master stood with the others, and sank to the ground at his feet, hurling the mattock from her with all her strength. She knelt before him, closed her eyes ; her breath came in deep gasps :

" Kill me ! Kill me ! "

She did not cry out ; her eyes were shut, her voice, low and entreating, seemed to come from far off :

" Oh Master, kill me ! "

Then she was silent, never protesting as they led her out of the barn back to the kitchen, where she sank down in her chair by the great table, and seemed to fall asleep, her head bowed on her arms.

The others stood where she had left them, unable to understand her behaviour but filled with a tragic apprehension as they recalled how she had knelt at the master's feet.

Christian grasped the mattock, which Emma had flung aside, and cleared the ground. The corpse of his child lay before him. One golden tress still shone about the right temple of her desiccated skull ; her red and green dress lay bright amid the straw and mud ; the two little shoes were close together. Martens and rats, frightened out of their hiding-places, scurried across the barn.

Christian recoiled, the mattock fell from his hands. When he spoke, the voice was not his own ; a great peace seemed to enfold him like a cloak, spread by a strange, divine power.

" We must lock the doors. Anton will go for the police at once."

He pushed the men gently out of the barn, unlatched the doors from the wall, and bolted them shut. Then he sat down on the house-steps in the blazing sunshine. Exactly a year ago to the day, his child had disappeared ; now he had found her again. Not God's wrath nor His grace nor His hidden countenance were there, but only the presence of evil.

For the next few hours, a fearful desolation lay upon the house and yard ; the only living thing seemed to be the little white skull in the darkness of the locked barn ; a feeling of horror possessed the midday air. No one was called ; no one came to dinner. The women huddled together in their rooms, too frightened to discuss the subject ; they stared into each other's faces and found on them only their own consternation. The men gathered in groups behind the sheds, as speechless as the women ; and everything about them was silence. Emma sat in the kitchen alone, her hands clasped together, staring into space, her eyes dilated at the horror of her knowledge, the turmoil in her soul holding her body in the rigid immobility of unconsciousness.

At about five o'clock, as the cows came home at milking time, two policemen arrived. Christian led them to the barn, opened it and pointed without a word to the narrow passage between the piles of sheaves. He fell to the floor, fainting ; two of his men carried him into the house and laid him down in the parlour.

Without touching anything, the police inspected the barn and the corner in which the little skeleton lay. Then they proceeded to an investigation of the household. The barn door was bolted and sealed ; one of the policemen remained to guard it, while the other rode off with a written report for the magistrate. No one was allowed to leave the immediate precincts of the house, not even to drive the cattle out next morning, before the official inquiry had been held. Later in the evening, another policeman was sent to strengthen the guard for the night. Darkness fell over the sleepless, terror-stricken house. On the morrow, hungry and tired, they gathered in the

kitchen, but no breakfast awaited them ; Emma still sat there, staring, lost in a strange waking swoon. One of the older maids attended to the most pressing domestic details.

At noon, the investigating authorities arrived. There were six men, including an Inspector and a medical expert. They spent four hours in the barn. The Inspector, with a policeman and a clerk, then took possession of the kitchen, sitting together on one side of the great table. They proceeded to question the members of the household. The master came in too : his face was that of a doomed man. The questions were simple, the answers clear and accurate : no evidence in any way modified that given the year before, save that some of the witnesses were missing : Martha, Karl and Gustav, and the boy Fritz Schütt. The Inspector asked various questions about Fritz. It was established that he had come back from the pond with a heavy load of reeds at half-past four, that the child Anna had followed him ; that no one had seen her accompany him into the barn ; that at a quarter to five he had gone to the kitchen to vespers with Güse and had drunk his mug of milk there as usual. No one had noticed anything unusual in his behaviour ; they all spoke well of him.

" When and why did he leave here ? " the Inspector asked Christian.

" At the same time as my sons, with whom he grew up. I got him his new place myself."

" Where is he now ? "

" On the Mandelkov estate at Plestlin."

" We'll talk to him there to-morrow."

By the time the inquiry reached this stage, it was already midnight ; the people of Treuen were pale with lack of sleep and exhausted by the heat, excitement and terror. The officers sat on at the long table, covering sheet after sheet with notes. They had undone their high collars ; the perspiration streamed down their faces. At last the clerk blotted the last sheet, and, pushing the whole pile of documents towards the Inspector for his signature, he leaned back in his chair and yawned. As everyone was at last

ready to leave the room, they became aware of Emma's voice, low but penetrating.

She had made her deposition among the first, answering all the Inspector's questions ; when he dismissed her, she had gone over to the corner by the range and stood there like a statue for four hours long. No one had noticed her, no one even thought of her as the questions about Fritz were being asked. Her eyes, full of infinite grief and infinite pain and love, had never moved from her master's face ; her toil-worn hands were clasped in fervent prayer ; a hundred times she had prayed through closed lips, beseeching for mercy for her own heart and calling upon God to forgive her heart that had lost all motherly love. Now the hearing was over, the Commission was about to leave ; Emma could struggle no longer. She felt herself falling to her knees, and saying in a low voice but clearly enough for all to hear :

" Sir, my son Fritz is the murderer. I saw him with the mattock. Don't believe he is innocent ; don't believe those who stand up for him."

So deep was the silence after she had spoken that the beat of the moths' wings, as they whirred about the light, seemed to break across the room like the frail echo of a distant thunder. Then, amid a shuffling of feet, those who stood about Emma drew aside, making a sort of passage at the end of which Emma stood crouching in the corner. The Inspector spoke up from the middle of the room :

" What did you say ? Stand up and repeat that, please."

But Emma made no move. Still gazing imploringly at Christian, she said : " Kill me, Master, dear Master, kill me."

Christian rose and went to her. Gently, he raised her, then led her to a chair by the table. The officers resumed their seats ; the Inspector asked her for the second time :

" Who are you ? "

" Emma Schütt."

" Are you Fritz Schütt's mother ? "

" Yes."

" It is my duty to inform you that you need make no statement that might incriminate your son."

" Yes."

" Do you understand ? As a mother, you need not say anything bad about your son, even if he has done something bad."

" Yes."

" Very well, then. Now tell me : what is it you saw him do ? "

" I saw him with the mattock," Emma answered.

" What mattock ? "

" The one I brought to the barn yesterday."

" Where did you get it from ? "

" From under the eaves where all the tools hang."

" When did you see your son with it ? " the Inspector asked.

" On the day it happened."

" Do you mean on June 24th, last year ? "

" Yes."

" Do you remember what time it was ? "

" An hour before supper."

" Did you speak to your son then ? "

" Yes."

" What did you say ? "

" I said : ' What are you doing with that mattock ? ' He laughed, swung it around him and said : ' Oh I just needed it for something.' "

" He laughed, did you say ? "

" Yes."

" Well he can hardly have been doing anything very wicked, if he laughed."

" No."

" Is that all you know ? "

Emma did not answer. Jumping to her feet, she rushed from the room, her hands over her face.

" Suspicious ! " the Inspector murmured to the policemen. " Keep an eye on her."

The inquiry was adjourned ; the officers drove quickly

back to town, after posting guards ; the household dispersed, leaving Christian alone. He put out the light. The thin sickle of the moon stood in the sky amid a crowd of clear, brilliant stars which lit the landscape below with a dim silver light. Christian left the kitchen, stole softly upstairs to Emma's room, opened the door. As he did so, a scream rent the air, terrible as the scream of an animal in agony, and Emma, with a wild spring, flung herself sheer across the wide bed against the window. The next instant there was a clatter of broken glass and a sharp crackling of wood, and Christian, leaping across the room, reached the window just in time to catch Emma by the skirt. Making a tremendous effort, he managed to hold her struggling form with his right hand, while, with his left he carefully broke away the splintered glass, making a gap wide enough to draw her back again without further harm. He laid her on her bed, lit the light ; both of them were bleeding. Emma's head, throat and breast were badly gashed ; the glass had cut Christian's hands and arms. Emma lay where he had laid her, her eyes closed, her body racked with sobs ; but instead of tears, it was blood that streamed over her face.

Attracted by the scream and the smashing of glass, the sentry by the barn rushed to the house and knocked at the door ; but Christian paid no attention. He turned the light out again, he lifted Emma gently in his arms and carried her down the dark staircase into the parlour ; there he staunched the blood from her wounds and his, and washed them clean. Then he sat down to watch over her. His own suffering was dead within him ; his despair had burned itself away ; even his hope in death was gone. Henceforth his life would move within a narrow orbit in the shadow of God's hand ; what remained to him of his body's power and of the tenderness in his heart he would expend now upon the lives of others.

CHAPTER VII

Ever since he had left Treuen, early in the spring, until July, Fritz had lived peacefully as only a boy can, perfectly content with his work, his position and life in general. His master, Mandelkov, was a magistrate in a little borough of some two thousand souls, with two important highways running through it and meeting in a little square. Mandelkov's farm was a small one, but, in addition, he owned a turf kiln at a quarter of an hour's walk over the heath. This kiln was the only object that broke the level, fertile landscape for twenty miles around. Fritz, to his great joy, had much driving to do ; and the care of the horses—four powerful drays for the turf-wagons and two carriage horses for the master—was specially assigned to him. The master, too, drove much over the countryside.

Small as it was, the village was a new world to Fritz. There were streets and houses instead of a limitless expanse about him ; there were people he did not know and people who did not know him. He felt proud and he swaggered as he drove through the streets, urging the horses to a gallop if his cart was empty ; as he sat up on the box, too, he would let the reins hang loosely and he would never look to right or left though he could feel the glances of others upon him. When he brought a cart back loaded, he would walk casually beside it, whistling softly to himself. Everyone noticed and liked him, for he proved neat, handsome and hardworking. The girls giggled and blushed and nudged one another as he passed ; women looked up from their work, smiling ; even the men wished him well and greeted him amiably if they happened to meet.

But for all this, Fritz had no friend ; he was never seen in the long line of young men that followed the equally long line of young women down the village street. He was

never at the well, either, or in the little taproom of a Sunday.

When he first saw the quarters he must share with three other hands, he was struck with terror. He stood in the darkness by the bedside without moving, buttoning and unbuttoning his coat, fidgeting with his clothes, hesitating between obedience and repulsion. By delaying and puttering about, he managed to stay up until the others had fallen asleep ; as soon as he heard them snoring, he slipped out to the stable and lay down on a bundle of hay. He repeated this every night until the mistress noticed it and mentioned it to Mandelkov with a laugh. She liked Fritz very much ; he worked so hard and was always willing to do the many services she asked of him in the kitchen and about the house. He would help wash the dishes and lend a hand with the laundry down by the little river that ran through the place ; as he worked with the women, he would sing hymns for them in his beautiful, rich voice. Gradually, too, he had learned how to laugh with other people, not in his old uncanny, voiceless chuckle but with a new, high, clear, girlish giggle.

Fritz was never homesick ; he scarcely remembered the place where he had spent all his days. But occasionally he would think of his mother, especially when he held his wages in his hands, not knowing what to do with them since always he had given her what he earned. He had no needs and therefore no use for the money ; and he could not find a place to keep it in. He did not care to leave it in the bedroom, where he never slept ; so he took it with him to the stable, where he buried it in one corner. Not even the act of digging a hole, hiding his money and covering up the hole again awakened the slightest memory in his mind ; neither dream nor passion stirred him. Sometimes in the morning, on awaking, he would find his hands clenched and pressed hard against his body, his nails dug into his palms ; he would be curiously, unaccountably tangled up with strands of straw. Then he would laugh as he shook himself free and the straw fell away. . . .

Fritz was always the first at the well in the morning. Girls, aglow with the heat of summer and youth, beckoned and called, but he would purse his lips scornfully and cram his hands deeper into his trouser-pockets. If the girls came too close to him, he would elbow them aside and stride off whistling. Thus he acquired the reputation of being a particularly respectable lad. He was peaceful, orderly and safe in a world safe, orderly and peaceful. Everything smiled upon him.

Yet Fritz had an enemy. The brand on his brow, unnoticeable to others, was visible to a man of evil. For evil knows evil, and, under features lovely as an angel's, the Devil knows his own. The villain, in this case, was Fritz's new master, Mandelkov, the magistrate.

Mandelkov was a small, thin man, fifty years of age, with a hunched right shoulder and a face completely hidden by a beard of extraordinary length that began at his temples and overran his cheeks, mouth and chin. His only feature clearly visible was a pair of small, grey, penetrating eyes. He talked a great deal in a high, thin voice which seemed to be forcing its way up through his pinched, narrow chest. He did no work ; his hands were small, delicate. As a child, he had attended school in the city ; he was uncommonly shrewd in all business matters. People called him a sly fox, but that never prevented them from consulting him ; indeed, his advice was sought far and wide. This counselling and concern with the affairs of others became an obsession with him ; though miserly and mean, he scarcely gave his farm a thought, save when he seemed to be laying less money aside than usual. Then he would scold his wife bitterly.

He was a younger son, but he had inherited all the property he now held, save that the peat kiln was an idea of his own. This industry had never occurred to anyone else in the place. Mandelkov had lived alone for many years and was past middle-age when he married his housekeeper. Their union proved childless. Night after night, Mandelkov sat in the town tavern, drinking little, reading the

newspapers and holding forth at great length before the assembled peasants. He often drove over to the country-town, too, where he knew all the officials of the departments of Justice and Police. Nor was there a soul there whose public and private careers Mandelkov did not know, for long ago he had given up living his own life and interested himself in the lives of others.

Within his slight and deformed chest, Mandelkov nursed a terrible secret, from which he fled all his life. He had had an elder brother, a kindly giant of a man who looked after Mandelkov like a father. This brother, who had looked after the frail orphan and brought him up to manhood, Mandelkov left to die like a rat. He had been injured ; he lay in bed with a black, swollen wound on his arm and a raging fever. Mandelkov left him helpless in his room, pretending that he was going for a doctor, and locked the door behind him. The case was, in effect, urgent. In order not to overtax the horses during harvest-time, Mandelkov walked the long distance to the doctor's house, taking his time and enjoying the grateful vision of himself as heir to his brother's estate. On the morrow he brought the doctor back with him ; they reached home to find the brother dead, his body twisted into the most ghastly position, his face blue in death. The servants said they had heard nothing since the night before, when his groans had echoed through the house. The doctor made out the death certificate. He told Mandelkov that inflammation had set in and that had he reached him the night before he might have saved him. Thus Mandelkov inherited everything. Yet no fruit of the earth proved pleasing to him and no reward brought him delight. Life, for him, was but a painful breath to draw down into his hollow chest and then to expel. In order to escape from himself, he began to spy on other people ; whenever he came across a case of wrongdoing, he made it his business to see that justice and punishment followed.

Thus at present while he watched Fritz at his work and appreciated his keenness, Mandelkov was aware that the lad kept strictly to himself. He drew his own conclusions.

If he heard Fritz laugh, he would smile his cold mocking smile behind his beard and screw up his little gimlet eyes. When his wife came to him and told him that Fritz was sleeping in secret in the stable, Mandelkov banged the table with his fist for very joy. He knew all about the case of Anna Scheffel ; it was this very incident which had first caused him to engage Fritz. Presently, he began to notice that Fritz had never once mentioned the matter and that whenever anybody had happened to bring it up, the lad had listened in silence and indifference, instead of boasting that he had been there, which surely would be a boy's normal reaction. When Fritz drove him over the countryside, Mandelkov would watch him from the carriage, his eyes, keen as a hunter's, tracing every line in the strong young back that jogged up and down on the box above him ; he would gaze constantly at the lad's powerful straight neck, tanned by the sun, at his fair hair, at his well-shaped delicate ears, not quite close enough to the skull, glowing and pink on either side of his cap. Once, in the middle of the night, Mandelkov had risen from bed, slipped out to the stable, roused Fritz from his slumber and forbidden him to spend the night anywhere save in the room allotted to him. Then, thoroughly satisfied, he had settled down to observe with what ingenuity and caution Fritz nevertheless managed to sleep in the stable. But Mandelkov was careful not to repeat the injunction.

One evening in June, about the time when Anna's corpse was found at Treuen, the Mandelkovs sat at supper with their household. Mandelkov had heard news of the discovery from some policemen at the tavern. He waited until everyone had begun to eat ; then, suddenly, his eyes devouring Fritz's face as the lad sat peacefully over his plate :

" Here's a piece of news for you, Fritz," he shot out, " They've found Anna after all."

The spoon fell from the lad's hand, he tore his eyes free from his master's hypnotic gaze and forced himself to look out of the window. Not only the words overwhelmed Fritz,

but especially the malevolent glance that accompanied them. No one had ever looked at him like this before. Now, in a single glance, Fritz found the whole world suddenly turned hostile to him—a world whose enemy he himself had been, certainly, but which had hitherto always proved kindly towards him. A hopeless terror gripped him. His face turned ashen pale ; it was but a grey mask. The light went out of his eyes, as though a hand had effaced it ; all his youth fled from him. His teeth chattered ; beads of perspiration collected on his brow, rolled down and splashed on his hands. Very slowly he recalled Mandelkov's words. His blood stirred again ; the instinct of fight awoke within him. He leaned back casually in his chair, thrust his hands deep into his pockets with a gesture of challenge. He turned his calm, unwavering glance full on his master ; Mandelkov's eyes fell. But presently Mandelkov looked up again.

" Tell me, Fritz," he asked. " How big was Anna ? "

" Oh, not so very big," Fritz answered, laughing.

" Why aren't you eating ? "

" It's too hot," Fritz answered, " I'm not hungry."

" Oh, you're not hungry, eh ? "

The others looked up at this and stared at Fritz ; the lad picked up his spoon again and went on eating. After supper, he finished his work, then, still shocked at the horror of Mandelkov's gaze, he went to his room to lie down. The men who shared his room came in. As soon as Fritz knew, from their deep breathing, that they were asleep, exhausted as he was, he could endure it no longer. He took his clothes, slipped downstairs and lay down in a cartload of hay which stood near the stable. It was a warm clear night ; the stars in the sky glittered. Fritz stared up at them high overhead ; they looked to him like the shining evil eyes of his master. Suddenly he sat up. What was the matter ? What did they want of him ? Why could they not leave him alone.

Suddenly he remembered the money he had buried in the stable. He jumped down from the cart, stole in, dug at the hole with his bare hands and found his money safe.

Yet someone might, after all, find it ; one never knew. Fritz took his money and knotted it in the tail of his shirt ; then he went back to the cart, buried himself deep in the warm, fragrant, drowsy hay and fell asleep. Towards morning, the moist dew awakened him.

After breakfast, at seven o'clock, he drove the empty turf-wagon over the moor. As usual he urged his horses to a gallop through the narrow lanes, as he stood on the box, his feet spread wide apart and the reins slack between his fingers. He helped to load the turf at the kiln, working swiftly and whistling as he did so. Everything, he told himself, was exactly the same as ever. In fact, it caused him no tremor to see his master, an hour or so later, coming over the heath accompanied by two policemen. They made straight for him ; one of the policemen drew a small black notebook from between two shining buttons on his tunic, opened the book and asked :

" Are you Fritz Schütt ? "

" That is my name."

" Very well, then : you must come along with us."

Fritz looked at his master :

" I can't leave my work," he protested.

Mandelkov said nothing, but his piercing eyes scanned Fritz's face. The officer laughed :

" You come along, young fellow, never mind about the work."

The words bewildered Fritz. In a daze, he dropped the lump of turf he had been about to fling up and followed the officers slowly. On the principal square of the little town, he was amazed to see the carriage from Treuen, with the two brown horses he had so often driven himself. He went over to them, patted their necks and made a low clucking sound ; they recognised him and stood moving their ears, whinnying with pleasure. Fritz picked up the reins and swung them lovingly in his hands. But the next moment, the officer pulled a stout cord from under the seat and bound the lad's hands together. Mandelkov's evil eyes rested on Fritz in triumph ; his glance so appalled him that Fritz

did not even attempt to struggle. They made him sit in the carriage beside one of the policemen, while the other drove the brown horses. This filled Fritz with fury ; he ground his teeth and tried to hide his hands, pressing them close to his body bending far over them. He lowered his head while his eyes darted about to see if he were being observed. Soon they had left the town and were speeding along the road to Treuen ; now Fritz's angry eyes left the policeman who was driving while he himself was forced to sit in the carriage with his hands bound together. Bitter hatred rose in him for the policeman, for the horses who so tamely suffered another to drive them, for the very carriage that he would have wished to stamp to splinters under his feet. But he concealed his rage and stealthily pressed his right foot against the floor of the carriage as though to hurt it. Stubborn and filled with hatred he returned to the home of his childhood. Now Treuen came into sight, first the broad highway, where they turned off into the woods, next the pond, the fields and meadows, then the tenant land with its cottages, and at last the courtyard. They drove in amid a clatter of hoofs and wheels ; they drew up by the well. From afar, Fritz had made out people in the courtyard, but now it was empty ; he could see no one, not even his former master or his mother. They alighted ; the policemen took off their caps and mopped their perspiring foreheads. The heat had grown more oppressive than ever ; a flock of woolly clouds, white and grey, obscured the sky. The air quivered. The policeman who had driven them over, adjusted his clothes, and, at a soldierly gait, strode into the farmhouse. Here the Inspector was waiting for them. Under the other policeman's eye, Fritz stood by the carriage, furtively tugging at the cord that bound his hands ; he said nothing. Presently the Inspector came out of the farmhouse accompanied by the other policeman and together they went towards Barn 4. The policeman motioned to the others to follow. His companion passed on the order to Fritz :

" Come on, now : forward march ! "

Fritz paid no attention. Turning his back, he looked at

the horses standing there still in harness, the sweat streaming down their flanks. They ought to have been wiped down with straw, he thought, and given a little fresh hay to restore them ; but Fritz's hands were bound and the policemen acted as though they had forgotten the horses' existence. Fritz was filled with an immense contempt for them and for this Inspector whom he was presently to meet.

" Come along there, get on," the policemen urged and slowly Fritz obeyed.

A policeman followed him at the regulation distance of three paces ; they reached the barn in file. Until now, a sentry had stood by the closed door day and night ; now, however, the door was open. But the two sides had not been pushed all the way back ; they swung at right-angles from the wall, forming a passage that led into the dark interior. The inspector and the second policeman stood waiting under the arched doorway half-way between the light outside and the dimness within. The Inspector had withdrawn a few steps into the shadow in order to watch Fritz more closely as the lad entered and to see his face in the bright sunlight. Sharp as his glance was, he could not detect the slightest unsteadiness in Fritz's step as he approached the scene of the tragedy ; Fritz's face, too, was quite impassive. As their eyes met, the Inspector read an air of defiance in Fritz's glance, yet a perfect candour. They stood before each other in silence. The policeman came to attention and saluted ; but the Inspector continued to stare at Fritz without a word, while the lad withstood his gaze patiently, quietly. Not a word escaped him, no untimely tell-tale question betrayed any excitement he might have felt. He held his bound hands before him, peered into the dim interior of the barn. At last the Inspector spoke. Raising a document he held in his right hand :

" Are you Fritz Karl Martin Schütt ? " he asked.

" Yes." Fritz answered readily, but he could not help laughing as he heard his many names read out with such solemnity.

" Born December 5th, 1870, at Graulitz ? "

" I must have been if it says so there," Fritz answered.

" That'll be enough joking," the Inspector said. " Just answer my questions with a ' Yes ' or ' No.' "

" It wasn't that, sir," Fritz put in calmly. " But I can't rightly say myself when I was born."

The Inspector vouchsafed no comment ; he continued to look at Fritz. The next question came suddenly, sharply :

" I suppose you don't know what happened to Anna Scheffel, eh ? "

" No, I don't," Fritz answered as calmly as before, " Nor does anyone else."

The Inspector felt that the trap he had laid was scarcely successful ; it had been a mistake and now, no doubt, the suspect had been warned and armed with resistance by his question.

" Follow me," the Inspector said, leading the way to the corner where the corpse lay exactly as it had been found. Fritz and the policeman did so. As the day was overcast and the barn doors not fully opened, they soon passed into utter darkness.

" Halt ! " the Inspector commanded. But the next step he took brought his head in violent collision with a plank jutting out from the wall. Fritz laughed as he heard the dull thud. He knew this place, every inch of it ; but he would tell them nothing. At last, groping their way cautiously, they reached a spot where a narrow beam of light filtered through the roof ; here the eye could make out vaguely the interior of the barn. Fritz blinked up at the hole in the roof.

" It's come to pieces already," he thought to himself.

The Inspector had stopped. They were all panting ; the air in the barn was suffocating. The Inspector asked :

" What is this place we're in ? "

" Barn 4," Fritz answered.

" You know it perfectly, do you ? "

" Yes," Fritz said, " I mended the roof last year with Güse. But I see it's coming through already." He examined the rent with critical eyes.

" I'm not talking about the roof, my lad," the Inspector said, signalling to the policeman on the right. Now Fritz noticed a ladder resting against the wall. The policeman climbed up ; with a pole which Fritz had not seen, he pushed up a square of thatch that had purposely been cut into the roof. Suddenly daylight streamed into the barn ; a patch of sky loomed over them. Spellbound, Fritz followed the course of a cloud moving slowly above ; it was as if he were seeing the sky and clouds for the first time. Though he watched Fritz closely, the Inspector saw nothing but the child-like wonder on his face as he gazed raptly upward at the fragment of sky so unexpectedly revealed.

" Now look down ! " the Inspector ordered, pointing to the ground where the grave stood directly in the light, the corpse still within it.

But Fritz did not look down at once. Dazzled by the light, he first blinked at the Inspector's face, read clearly the fierce suspense of the moment behind the man's pretended unconcern. Again, he felt the world turned enemy against him ; again he found the power to fight it. He let his glance roam cautiously down to the ground, directing it first towards the empty darkness, then along the smooth, straw-strewn floor until it rose gradually and fell, following the outline of the little mound. Here he saw a child's black shoe and something that glowed red ; further along there was a litter of earth with some little white things that he did not recognise. Some of them lay spread out as the fingers of a hand might be spread ; then suddenly Fritz distinguished the little skull, shining, and in the dead light from the cloudy sky, the cluster of blonde hair. He shuddered, drew back. But the Inspector, intent as he was, could read no horror on this lad's face beyond the perfectly normal reaction to such a sight. Now Fritz's eyes sought his, aghast but candid, wide, questioning.

" Do you recognise this corpse ? " the Inspector asked.

" No," Fritz replied, "I don't know what this is." He spoke in a low voice.

" What do you mean by ' this ' ? " the Inspector parried. " I asked you whether you recognised the corpse ? "

" —s that a corpse ? "

" Certainly." The Inspector paused. " I suppose you are going to try and tell me that you've never seen a corpse before."

Fritz shook his head and remained silent.

" Certainly you've seen a corpse before," the Inspector resumed. " And you've seen this corpse before, too. But it looked different a year ago, didn't it? Eh? It's only a heap of bones now, eh ? But it had flesh on it before, didn't it ? And eyes—and hair ? "

Fritz looked at the Inspector incredulously. Then he shook his head :

" What sort of corpse is it ? " he asked.

" Anna's, of course ! Who else could it be ? "

" Do you mean to say that is Anna ? " Fritz asked. He was excited now. He looked down at the skeleton once again ; the Inspector ordered the policeman to free Fritz's hands. The cord was damp with sweat and difficult to make loose. Perspiration ran down the faces of all of them ; it was only with the utmost effort that the Inspector could conduct his inquiry to the end.

" Kneel down," he ordered.

" What am I to do ? "

" Kneel down," the Inspector repeated.

" I won't do it ! "

" You'll do just as you're told," the Inspector snarled, " And the quicker you obey, the better for you."

He seized Fritz by the shoulders and forced him down on his knees beside the corpse :

" Take that shoe in your hand ! " he ordered.

Fritz did so.

" Can you see it clearly ? "

" Yes."

" Was Anna Scheffel wearing those shoes when she disappeared ? "

Fritz drew his hands away :

" I can't remember," he answered.

" Take that dress in your hand. Look at it carefully. Now tell me what it's like."

" It's some sort of red material."

" Look at it carefully. What else is it like ? '

" It's got some green in it, too."

" Is it striped ? " the Inspector asked.

" No : it's a pattern."

" Do you remember whether Anna Scheffel was wearing a dress like that ? "

" Yes, I remember," Fritz replied. " She was."

" Lift up the skirt."

Fritz obeyed. A pink petticoat, with white embroidered edge, came into view.

" Do you remember if this petticoat was Anna's too ? "

" No," Fritz protested, " I never undressed her."

" So you deny that this corpse here is Anna Scheffel's, do you ? "

" I can't say. It has no face."

" Well, every one of us is convinced that this is the poor child ; yes, you can take our word for it : it's Anna all right. You remember her, eh ? You remember how sweet she was, how happy and gay and friendly, eh ? Well, doesn't it make you sad to see her again like this ? "

" It's all so long ago."

" Yes, but you remember her well enough, don't you ? " the Inspector insisted. " You used to play with her a lot, didn't you ? "

" Yes, certainly."

" Very well then : isn't it terrible for you to see her here at your feet like this, a corpse ? "

" I don't know it," Fritz repeated. " It's got no face."

The Inspector said no more ; he merely looked down at him kneeling on the ground. Fritz's attitude was calm, serene ; his hands rested lightly against his thighs, his head was bent slightly forward, his back straight. The light filtering down from the roof fell on his boyish neck, on his fair hair, his pink, delicate ears. His eyes were fixed on his

knees or on the narrow line of straw between himself and the corpse ; or they might have been shut under his downcast lids. He looked like an obstinate, but withal an honest child.

" You may get up now," the Inspector said as he turned to leave. " I shall ask you a few more questions in the parlour."

Fritz rose, brushed off the straw and dust from his knees. Red welts stood out on his wrists where the bonds had chafed ; he pressed his hands together to ease the pain. Then he followed the Inspector quietly, but still sullen. As they crossed the courtyard, he passed Blank, the steward, and a few farm-hands ; they stood still, staring at him, but Fritz thrust his hands deep in his pockets and passed by as though nothing were amiss. No greeting passed between them. Yet as Fritz and his escort neared the house, suddenly an immense fear of meeting Christian or Emma came over the lad. At the thought of meeting his former master, he trembled. He knew that whatever Christian cared to do to him, he would agree, without even attempting to defend himself, even though he were quite aware that he would be subjected to just the sort of catechism he had suffered at the hands of the Inspector. But Christian had never done anything to him in the past ; he had always been kind ; and Fritz's work here had been the most pleasant he had ever had to do after all. He wanted to give his mother the wages he had saved for her ; he recalled having knotted the money in his shirt and he grew calm again.

The parlour looked quite different now : the table had been pushed against the window, its pretty red cover had been removed. The top of the table, polished bright as a mirror, was strewn with papers ; chairs had been set about it. A clerk sat with a pen behind his ear, yawning. When the Inspector entered, he sprang to his feet, saluting ; the policeman stood in the doorway. The Inspector tossed his cap on the sofa, unbuttoned his coat and vest. His face was red from the heat, his exertions and the suffocating atmosphere in the barn ; there was a great blue bruise on

his forehead where he had collided against the plank. He loosened his collar, took down a towel that hung behind the door, wiped the sweat from his strong, short neck.

" Get me a drink, please," he said to the clerk. " Water."

The sky was now completely overcast ; outside, it was stifling. The clerk returned to report that the well had been dry for the last three days : there was no water, but the Inspector might have buttermilk.

" Anything, so long as I can drink it ! " the Inspector sighed.

Presently, the clerk returned with a jug of milk and a glass. At the same moment, the rain they had longed for began to fall in torrents. The Inspector looked out of the window and said :

" Well, there's some water, anyhow."

They all laughed at the sally, Fritz's high giggle loudest of all. The Inspector drank his milk, glancing at Fritz over the edge of his glass.

" Well," he said, " you can understand a joke, I see. Sit down, my boy, and take it easy. We're all thirsty ; this milk will do you some good. In a moment, after you've had a bit of a rest, I have a question or two to ask you. It doesn't amount to much ; in fact the Police asked you the same questions when they were here last year."

He drew up a chair for Fritz directly opposite his own, leaned back, crossed his legs and smiled. Outside, the rain fell ; a damp cool air moved through the room, bringing a feeling of coolness, of refreshment, almost of happiness.

Fritz sat down, holding his glass. He smiled back at the Inspector and in his clear, soft voice asked :

" You're not the Police, are you ? "

" Who, we ? No, indeed. We're only conducting an investigation for the Courts. That's not nearly so serious."

Fritz saw the guard at the door smile ; he went on drinking thoughtfully. The Inspector continued to look at him in silence then :

" Do you like milk ? " he asked.

" Oh, yes."

" Better than beer ? "

" I've never tried beer—beer costs money."

" What does that matter ? " the Inspector said. " You work for pay, don't you ? You could surely afford to buy a glass of beer now and again. What do you do with all your money ? "

Fritz made no answer, but went on drinking.

" You're saving it, eh ? " the Inspector pursued.

Fritz nodded.

" For whom are you saving it ? For your sweetheart, I expect ? "

" Oh, no ! " Fritz said with sudden irritation.

" Well, why shouldn't you be saving your money for your sweetheart ? " The Inspector laughed. " There's nothing wrong in that. You'll be a man pretty soon, now." He lowered his tone, and, winking confidentially :

" Have you ever been up to any foolishness ? You know what I mean ? "

" I've had my work to do and I've always done it."

" Yes, I know that," the Inspector said. " But what about after hours, eh ? Haven't you really got a girl ? "

" That's nothing to do with the Court," Fritz answered.

" Of course not ! " The Inspector was all affability. " But I thought we were just talking together as friends. You needn't tell me anything if you'd rather not. But a handsome young fellow like yourself . . . Oh, well, all right."

There was a pause. Then :

" So you only like to play with children, eh ? " the Inspector shot out. " Games and things. The way you used to with little Anna, for instance."

" Yes, I liked that."

" But she was such a small child. Didn't you ever hurt her, just by accident ? "

" No."

" Didn't you ever tease her, either, or hit her sometimes ? You know what a pest children can be. They're often very naughty indeed."

" Oh, no ! "

" Was Anna such a good little girl ? Didn't you ever have to punish her, oh, just the least little bit ? "

" No."

" So you were always nice and kind to her, eh ? " the Inspector persisted. " You used to kiss her and stroke her, eh ? "

Fritz laughed :

" Oh, no ! "

" Well, let's not talk about little Anna any more," the Inspector said shrugging his shoulders. " But you might as well tell me what you do with your money ? "

" It's for my mother."

" Oh, your mother. I see."

The Inspector was silent : he was thinking of the awful accusation the mother had made against a son who saved all his money for her. After a short pause, he began again :

" So you're very fond of your mother ? " he asked.

" Yes, I am."

" And she's fond of you, too ? "

" Of course she's fond of me."

" Did you ever cause her any trouble ? Any serious trouble, I mean. Never ? "

" I don't know anything about that. I brought her money with me."

" Oh, you did, did you ? Where is it ? Let me see ? "

Fritz demurred :

" I can't ! " he said.

" Oh ? " the Inspector contented himself with exclaiming, as his brows rose.

" It's in my shirt," the boy explained after an interval. " If I can go over in the corner, I'll get it out for you."

" Certainly you may, by all means." The Inspector laughed. " We don't want to see your shirt ; all we want to see is your money."

Fritz rose, went to a corner between the wall and the writing-desk ; he undid his clothes and took out his money. When he had readjusted his clothing, he returned to the table and put down three five-mark pieces.

" Fifteen marks, eh ? Well, you are a good son ! " the Inspector exclaimed as he clapped Fritz on the shoulders. The lad did not move ; he glanced at the other sideways, suspiciously, grave.

" What's the matter now ? " the Inspector asked. " I can see you've a good heart. You don't lie, either. If you hadn't shown me the fifteen marks, I wouldn't have believed another word you said. But now I can see you're truthful. Very well : I shall be truthful too. You've been more or less under suspicion, but everything is all serene now. Just answer an official question or two, quick and smart. Then you may go."

The Inspector fastened his collar again, buttoned up his vest and coat, smoothed his hair and sat down at the table beside the clerk. At a glance from his chief, the clerk had stopped making notes, so that the questions the Inspector had asked might seem quite informal. Now he fell to and wrote for dear life, recording all that had gone before.

It was now two o'clock in the afternoon ; all of them were hungry. The peaceful monotonous downpour continued. The sentry at the door shifted his weight furtively from one foot to the other ; Fritz caught the movement and laughed. The Inspector rapped on the table : suddenly he had once more become the Police Officer ; he sat there stiff, stern and aloof. In a cold voice, he ordered :

" Stand up ! "

Then, to the clerk :

" Ready ? "

" Yes, sir ! " the clerk said, finishing a paragraph and reaching for a fresh sheet of paper which he folded carefully.

" Do you understand that you are to answer merely ' Yes ' and ' No ' ? "

Fritz nodded.

" Very well. Are you Fritz Karl Martin Schütt, born on December 5th, 1870, at Graulitz ? Son of Karl Schütt, a day-labourer, and his wife, Emma Anton ? "

" Yes."

"You went to school at Lintzau? Learned to read and write and do sums there?"

"Yes."

"Confirmed in the Protestant faith, Easter 1883, in the Parish Church at Lintzau?"

"Yes."

"Entered the service of Friedrich Christian Scheffel, a farmer, at Treuen. You worked for him until three months ago, when you entered the service of Mandelkov, the magistrate, at Plestlin? And you are still employed by him?"

"Yes."

"Why did you leave Treuen?"

"I'm only to answer 'Yes' and 'No.'"

"Did you leave Treuen because you no longer liked the place?"

"No."

"Or had you perhaps done something you knew was wrong and you were afraid of being punished?"

"No."

"The master here is very particular, eh? Perhaps he had been especially strict?"

"No. The master is very kind. He was always like a father to me. And I always did my work well."

"And he never found fault with you?"

"No."

"Then why did you leave?"

"Because Anton took my work away from me."

"What work?"

"My work."

"I don't understand. That's no reason for anyone to leave a good place."

"It is."

"Are you telling me the truth?"

"Yes."

"Last year, on June 24th, between four o'clock in the afternoon and eight o'clock at night, your master's little daughter vanished completely. During the greater part of the day, and especially during the interval I mentioned,

you had been busy helping the roofer, Güse, to mend the thatch on the roof of Barn 4 ? "

" Yes."

" You fetched up reeds from the pond, where you saw Friederike and Minna minding the ducks. A short while before Anna disappeared, she ran down from the house to the pond ? "

" Yes."

" You spoke to her ? You took her with you to show her a bird's nest in the barn ? "

" No."

" That is a lie. You gave evidence before that she went into the barn with you to see a bird's nest that you wished to show her."

" Bird's nests are far too high up to show anyone."

" But Anna did go with you ? "

" Yes."

" Into the barn ? "

" No."

" Anna did not go into the barn with you ? "

" If she did, I didn't see her."

" Then where did she go ? "

" I don't know."

" But she came up from the pond with you ? "

" Yes."

" Do you remember what sort of dress she had on ? "

" Some sort of a red dress."

" And you didn't see her going anywhere when you came out of the barn again ? "

" No. She had already gone away."

" Where do you mean : away ? "

" I mean she wasn't about anywhere."

" What did you do with the mattock you had in your hand that afternoon when you met your mother ? You probably needed it for the reeds, eh ? "

" A knife is the only thing to cut reeds with."

" Then there must have been something else for which you used the mattock ? "

" I used it to chase a beggar away."

" You chased him away ? With a mattock ? "

" No : he ran away by himself."

" When everyone ran about calling and searching for the child where did you look for her ? "

" I didn't look for her."

" Why not ? "

" I helped Karl make a bonfire to light up the place."

" Was that your way of helping to find the child ? "

" I don't know."

" I see. What were you doing between four and eight o'clock that day ? "

" Working with Güse. At vespers, I drank some milk ; then I went off by myself for a spell to sleep."

" You can remember everything quite clearly ? "

" Yes."

" Do you often go off and sleep like that during the daytime ? "

" No."

" What made you do so that particular day ? "

" It was hot ; I had had a big load to carry."

" Oh yes, of course. Reeds."

" Yes."

" Now then, to-day you recognised the corpse in Barn 4 as that of Anna Scheffel ? "

" No ; I did not."

" Well, we are certain that the corpse in the barn is that of Anna Scheffel who disappeared from here on June 24th last year and who was buried in the barn that very day by some unknown person. Do you understand ? At the very time and in the very place you were working : in the barn. Now tell me, did you notice anything at all which might lead us to a clue ? Any strange person, or cry, or sound ? "

" No."

" Think carefully. Surely you must have noticed something ? "

" Güse noticed nothing either."

" Quite so. But you say you saw a stranger . . . a vagabond . . ."

" Yes ; he was standing by the well."

" But he might have slipped back again to the barn. Did you notice anything unusual ? "

" No. He ran across the fields. The others saw him go, too."

" Exactly. You took it all in, didn't you ? "

" Yes."

" And you always speak the truth ? "

" Yes, sir."

" All right : now you may go, my boy. And you've nothing to be afraid of, do you understand ? They won't tie up your hands any more either."

" That's good. It made me pretty wild, that did."

" You may tell everyone that you've completely cleared yourself and that we're convinced you had nothing to do with all this."

" Yes, sir."

The Inspector had finished. He stood up. Fritz walked slowly towards the door, hesitated for a moment, then went out. He stood in the hall, looking out through the open doorway. The rain poured down in heavy, straight shafts that made little bubbles as they struck the flagstones. From time to time, a maid, unrecognisable with her skirt pulled over her head, would scurry across the yard and vanish into stable or stall. No one took the slightest heed of Fritz. The sound of voices from behind the kitchen door reached his ears. Here, too, in his own home, everything was changed and hostile. He told himself he had better be going back to Mandelkov's, since he no longer worked at Treuen ; then he remembered he had left his mother's money on the table. He turned to go back into the parlour, but he saw the handle of the door moving to the pressure of a hand on the other side. He fled out into the storming rain and across the yard, through the fields, without looking back until he had reached the woods beyond. There he stopped, brushed his hair from his eyes and laughed for

sheer joy at the warm rain trickling down his back. Under the shelter of the trees, he walked on towards the highroad, delighting in the sensation as his bare feet trod on the soft, swollen moss. When he reached the highroad, he took off his coat and hung it like a hood over his head and shoulders ; then he set off at a trot for Schweinachstein, arriving there tired and wet through. At the edge of the town he fell in with a man from a nearby farm who was driving a cart ; the other gave him a lift almost all the way to Plestlin, which he reached just as supper was being served. He slipped into his room, put on a dry shirt and his Sunday trousers and carried his wet clothes into the stable to dry. Then he went into the house.

The household had already finished eating ; only Mandelkov still sat at the table. He did not look up as Fritz entered. Exhausted with hunger and fatigue, Fritz was none the less disturbed by his master's presence.

" It's not my fault if the work's not done," he said, trying to cover up his nervousness by conversing. " They waste a person's whole day with their questions. They've got nothing else to do."

Mandelkov paid no attention. The maid brought Fritz a large bowlful of soup ; he fell to, his good spirits returning. Suddenly Mandelkov rushed over towards him from across the table and brought his gleaming little eyes within an inch of the lad's face. As Fritz looked up from his plate, startled, Mandelkov spoke. His voice was low and friendly, inviting confidences.

" Well, my lad, tell me what they wanted ? "

Fritz turned away and spoke loudly :

" Oh, they're trying to find out from everybody whether they saw Anna or not."

" There's no need to shout like that," Mandelkov said as he retreated to his side of the table.

Fritz went on eating ; the other resumed his watching. Then, once again Mandelkov approached, coaxing :

" Well, Fritz, I only hope you had nothing to do with it, that's all. For you may be sure they'll get you, if you did."

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" I had nothing to do with it. It wasn't me. I don't know anything about it."

" Of course not. But all the same you looked very much upset, didn't you, Fritz ? "

Fritz said nothing, though he glanced up at Mandelkov. The master was bending down over the table again, his head thrust upward, his face puckered up into an ingratiating smile ; but his eyes bored through Fritz liked drills. The lad recoiled before Mandelkov's sinister gaze. Mandelkov's voice was low, too, as he said :

" Oh, I was only joking, Fritz."

Then, of a sudden, he shouted :

" Finish up your dinner, Fritz, finish it up, I say." His tone was high, excited. " If you've done nothing, you can eat, eh ? "

Fritz turned slowly back towards the table and sat down :

" I don't see why everyone has to talk about Anna all the time."

" I expect you could talk plenty if you wanted to, eh, Fritz ? How about it ? "

" I ? I couldn't tell anything about it . . . don't know anything at all about it . . ."

" That's your good luck ! " Mandelkov said rising, while Fritz finished eating.

During the next week, nothing untoward occurred. Though Fritz felt no shadow of fear, though neither the cross-examination nor the sight of the skeleton troubled him, he nevertheless went about quietly and alone. He had been deeply moved by his visit to his old home, by the sight of the wheatfields and pastures, the farmyard with the stables and barns. But it was all different now ; everything was deserted, his master and mother were nowhere to be seen ; doubtless they had been lurking behind some door, watching as he passed. People were avoiding him now, as he had formerly avoided them. He felt that the whole world was turned upside down, that his own life was utterly altered. What if Christian were not the master at Treuen any longer ? What if strangers now lived in the

parlour among their own possessions, if his old home belonged to somebody from the town, somebody who did not even wear a uniform? Suppose the new owner of Treuen were to come to him instead of his old master and ask him question upon question? Well, he would not be able to help himself; they would do what they wanted with him anyhow. Fritz's thoughts took a gloomy turn; dejected and desperate, he went about his work mechanically; nor did his gaiety return until the following Saturday, when he was paid and buried his money safely in the stable. On the morrow, about midday, as he stood leaning against the stable door, clean and fresh, clad in his Sunday best, he was suddenly moved to sing. But something seemed to choke him; his throat ached; with the utmost effort he could only produce a few thin, shrill notes. He stopped, amazed and vexed. Once again, he was being tormented; enemies hemmed him in on every side. So, they prevented him from singing, did they? Very well: he could at least whistle. Defiantly he began to do so. At once, Mandelkov, somehow, was standing behind him; a second later, they were face to face.

"So, my friend, you're innocent, eh? But you let them tie your hands together all the same, didn't you?"

Fritz did not blink an eye; he whistled a long phrase to the end, nonchalant. Then:

"Oh, that," he said. "That was a mistake. They set me free a moment later."

"Well, I've caught you in a lie," Mandelkov said moving off. "And don't forget it."

Fritz whistled the rest of the tune Mandelkov had interrupted, but from that day on avoided him sedulously.

On the following Wednesday a bailiff brought a summons to Fritz; he was to present himself on the morrow at the inn before the Deputy Criminal Inspector from Berlin. In the meantime, he was left purposely alone and idle, in order that he might be watched. But his conduct was in no way suspicious. On Thursday morning, he left his stable as usual, groomed his horses, gave them water and hay.

After breakfast, he put on his Sunday clothes and set out at nine o'clock. Little did he suspect that he was being shadowed by a plain-clothes man, as he made his way calmly to the village, never pausing a moment to rest, never looking to the right or left. Nor could the detective observe in him the faintest desire to escape. When Fritz reached Lintzau, he went straight to the little inn where he asked for the gentleman from Berlin, since he had read, at the head of his summons, the legend " Office of the Criminal Commission of Berlin." The innkeeper bade him sit down at a table and brought him beer and two thick slices of bread and butter. Fritz, who was hungry and thirsty after his long walk, ate and drank with gusto. Suddenly a policeman appeared. He had not entered through the public doorway, but from a small door, through which Fritz caught a swift glimpse of the adjoining room, where two men sat at a table littered with papers. Anger rose in him. He pushed the beer and the rest of the bread away from him. The policeman, smiling affably, sat down beside him.

" Did you like that ? " he asked. " Was it good ? Have another beer."

" No thanks. I'm not thirsty."

" Oh come along now : just one more. You've been a long way this morning." The policeman signed to the innkeeper to bring Fritz another glass. " The Inspector wants to have a little chat with you presently. But there's no hurry. Take it easy, there's plenty of time."

" I'm not tired."

" So much the better," the policeman said as he rose. " But you must wait all the same. We're not ready for you yet."

Then he went out again, leaving Fritz alone in the taproom. There were few customers, since it was a week-day ; only a few wagoners who drank their beer standing and filled the room with their coarse, rough voices, going away as soon as they had finished. Curiously, they watched Fritz sitting at the table in his Sunday clothes and asked the innkeeper who his fine customer might be. The innkeeper

shrugged his shoulders and with obvious distaste explained that the Court was sitting in his private room. Nobody in Lintzau knew Fritz ; but the glances of these people roused his ire. As he drank his second glass of beer, he felt his head go hot, his veins swelling and his eyes afire. The policeman returned : the Court would be ready soon, he said. He urged Fritz not to finish his beer, which must be flat after standing so long, and suggested he try a glass of wine. Fritz refused : his anger suddenly evaporated and a cool contempt filled him. When at last he was ushered in before the Inspector, his expression was sullen and impenetrable.

" I sent for you because I wish to complete our information," the Inspector began, eyeing the boy keenly. He noted with satisfaction that Fritz's round face wore an angry flush, that his eyes blazed darkly. " I had them serve you some refreshment because I knew you made the long journey over on foot."

" I don't need any wine or beer either," Fritz said. " You're after me again, that's all. You won't let me be ! But I can't tell you any more than I've told you already."

" I've not deserved such animosity on your part," the Inspector replied. " Besides, the law compels you to answer my questions. And to tell the truth, too, nothing but the truth."

He took up his documents and repeated a few questions out of the previous inquiry ; then he asked Fritz what he had meant by telling some of his fellow-workers on the farm : " They'll never find her again," and, " She's been done away with, all right."

But Fritz said nothing. With the bitter taste of the beer in his mouth, he could not down his wrath : he thought of the work he was missing, feared lest he lose his place and earn no more wages. Enemies hemmed him about, yet he was not afraid of them, but only furiously contemptuous. The Inspector could draw no answer from him beyond a shrug of the shoulders ; his last word was always :

" I don't know. I've told you everything I can. It wasn't me."

The Inspector was forced to conclude his inquiry. As Fritz made to leave without a word of farewell, the Inspector waited until he had reached the door, then suddenly called out after him :

" Oh, by the way, my lad, here's the money you left behind you at Treuen. Your mother refuses to accept anything from you."

And he threw the silver coins on the table. Fritz stopped dead in his tracks ; he did not turn. Suddenly his face went white as a sheet ; but all the Inspector could see was the tremor that passed through his body. A sudden hush fell over the room as the officers of the law watched him. At last Fritz turned and came back to the table very slowly. Dazed, groping, he felt for the money, then, clearing his throat, somehow he managed the question :

" Why wouldn't she ? "

" Because she believes you have brought disgrace upon her," the Inspector answered guardedly.

Fritz gripped the money tight in his hand and stalked out without a word. The stage happened to be leaving at that moment ; he rode back in it part of the way. It was late afternoon when he reached home. He went straight to his room, changed his clothes and set about his work immediately. He took his money out of the pocket of his Sunday coat and carried it, clasped in his hand, until he found an opportunity of hiding it in the stable again. He scraped away the earth in one corner and laid away the money in the little hole. As he filled up the hole again and smoothed it over, of a sudden he felt lost . . . trapped. . . . They were at his throat now, they had him, because his mother had set them upon him. His hands trembled as he patted the ground flat over the hole, and pushed the straw over it. He was afraid. He hastened out of the stable and went back to his work, brought the loaded carts home over the heath, unharnessed the horses, gave them their fodder. A mortal terror seized him as he caught sight of Mandelkov hurrying towards him. Fritz turned away to avoid him ; but at once the hoarse cackling voice called to him, and,

a moment later, Mandelkov stood over the lad. In vain Fritz had sought to elude his persecutor ; now Mandelkov, panting, fanned the boy's cheek with his breath :

" Aha, they got after you this time, eh ? They got after you properly ? "

Fritz made no reply ; his glance wandered over to the corner where his money lay hidden.

" You must have done something pretty bad," Mandelkov continued, " or they wouldn't have bound your hands the other day, would they ? "

Still Fritz made no reply.

" It'll be two years for you, eh ? "

Now Fritz spoke. His face was pale, gentle, infinitely sad :

" Something's going to happen. They won't let me alone. They want to do me harm. The gentleman from Berlin is a clever gentleman : he made them give me wine, but I could see he was up to something and I wouldn't drink it. I won't do what they want. But perhaps it *will* be two years. Perhaps they will get that out of me."

Slowly the colour came back to his face ; his eyes shone ; he seemed unable to check the flow of words :

" But afterwards, when the two years are over and I get out again, then I'll have a bad time of it—I know that. I'll have a bad time of it because they'll have done something to me. No—they'd better let me be : then everything will be all right and no harm done. But if they don't, I'll make them give me my two years' wages and five hundred marks besides, for tying my hands together. Yes, they'd best let me be. . . . "

" Good lad ! Bravo ! " Mandelkov cried. " That's right ; that's the idea ! "

" Yes, I'm not going to let them get me drunk or I might give away something. Then they'd have heard things. . . . I'd have told them . . . I'd have told them a lot . . . I'd have brought disgrace on someone then for sure ! "

Suddenly he broke off ; his eyes grew wide, dark ; he seemed to be struggling against tears. Mandelkov was

completely at a loss ; he could only repeat the words with which he had begun the conversation.

" Yes, they got after you this time, eh ? They got after you properly ! "

" Yes, they thought I'd tell them something ! " Fritz spoke in a low monotone. " They want to know something all right, but I don't know anything."

Dazed, exhausted by his own words, he walked away. Mandelkov watched him with a smile, his eyes gleaming. On the morrow, he drove into the country-town and made a sworn statement of the conversation.

Two days later, Fritz Schütt was arrested for the murder of the child Anna Scheffel and taken to Graulitz. Two policemen came to Mandelkov's before dawn. Cunningly, Mandelkov led them first to Fritz's room, then through the house and finally to the stable, where they found the lad and roused him. Fritz was perfectly calm ; he reached for his clothes without a word ; then he asked for permission to wash at the well. Stripped to the waist, he let the water run over his shoulders, breast and back ; his young body shone white in the early morning. Next he asked for his shoes ; the policeman sent a maid to fetch them. She returned with a coat and an extra shirt, which she handed to Fritz with a glance of sympathy. Escort and prisoner were already in the road by the front door when Mandelkov called to Fritz. He was lurking behind a curtain at a window on the ground-floor. Fritz came to the window ; Mandelkov leaned out, his shirt, unbuttoned, revealing his narrow, bony chest. He reached out a long, thin arm, pressed a five-mark piece into Fritz's hand, gripping the coin very tightly in his small, clammy hand. He thrust his head forward, too, and, bringing his gaping mouth and rough, long beard very close to Fritz's ear :

" Take care of yourself," he whispered. " Don't let them get the best of you.

Then, suddenly, he pushed Fritz away so violently, that the lad almost lost his footing. The policemen placed themselves on either side of him and the group moved off

down the road. As they passed between the rows of houses, Fritz peered out from under lowered lids, wondering whether there were many people watching him. But it was still very early, little more than three o'clock. There were only two women on the road in front of them, bowed and half-hidden under the heavy baskets they carried ; as they walked, their full-pleated skirts swung to the rhythm of their slow, cumbersome tread. Yesterday, it had rained all day long ; the sprouting grain, sere and yellow in the great heat, had turned a dull brown ; under the dawning sky, earth and air were damp, cool. . . . The three walked to Lintzau whence they were to take the stage-carriage the rest of the way. Fritz moved forward quietly, his eyes on the ground, his face serene as a child's. But his heart was heavy within him. His entire universe—that world he had trusted in so blindly, that glorious world that had borne him in safety and happiness, awake or sleeping, all his life—had suddenly fallen away from him ; it had turned out to be but a dream which *they* had shattered. *They* had driven him from his work and home ; his mother had forsaken him ; his wages had been stolen ; many enemies beset him. In this mood of uncomplaining, meek despair, Fritz reached the end of his journey and entered the jail.

He paid almost no attention to his new surroundings, submitting quietly to cross-examination and betraying not the slightest sign of guilt. Little by little, his melancholy left him ; at last, he was able to sing softly to himself in his cell. At rare moments a sullen shadow flitted across his childlike face. Before the police officers, he was on his guard, proved himself clever, subtle, met their questions with brief replies, never contradicted himself. Nor did he tell a lie. If he could not tell the truth—indeed, he did not know the truth—sensing that the truth was his enemy and might endanger his life, he would stick to his : " I don't know anything about it."

The revival of the case involved an enormous expenditure of time and labour. Before the charges against Fritz could

be definitely pressed, all the evidence given at the trial of the gipsies had to be re-examined ; countless witnesses and experts had to be subpœnaed and questioned, because the accused, at the time of the murder, was under eighteen years of age, and could not be tried under oath. The burden of proof, therefore, must rest upon circumstantial evidence as gathered from reliable witnesses. At first, Emma, too, had been put under surveillance as a possible accessory after the fact ; but this suspicion melted away before her terrible arraignment of her son. She had steadfastly refused to give any reason for her strange action ; lacking reason, her evidence shed but scant light on the matter. Nor could she be prevailed upon to visit her son in jail, although the prosecution held high hopes from such an interview. On the other hand, Mandelkov, the prisoner's master, made many gratuitous offers to visit Fritz and force him to confess. He would come to the boy's cell ; he would laugh with that boisterous laughter of his that invited confidences ; he would joke and wink, playing the rôle of the friendly counsellor, hoping to worm some incriminating statement out of him. But Fritz merely stared at him without speaking or laughing in answer.

Thus every attempt to wring a confession from the accused proved futile ; and though investigation on the scene of the crime seemed to heap up arguments against him, when he was faced with them, they collapsed before his assurance and calm. For Fritz, the period of preparation before the trial passed rapidly. He worked in the daytime, ate very little and waited for every questioning with suspense. At night, he slept soundly on his hard bed, occasionally dreaming vague dreams, out of which he would awake to find his hands clenched together, his fingers buried in his flesh. As he drew them loose again, the old voiceless laughter would shake his frame. He was very proud that they had given him a cell to himself. He kept it immaculate, arranging his bed exactly as prescribed and eating so carefully that nothing ever fell from his plate. In November, they brought him winter clothes, sent to him by Christian

Scheffel. He put them on at once with a childish joy and wore them in Court on the day the trial opened. He had not changed in any respect save that sometimes an expression of melancholy passed over his handsome face. Utterly without excitement, almost with a sort of quiet pride, he took his place in the dock. He did not look about him, but followed the trial with unfailing attention. The statement of the charge against him lasted three hours. Once again it set forth in minutest detail all that was known of Anna Scheffel's story beginning with her disappearance, going on to the pursuit of the gipsies and their trial and reciting the discovery of the corpse in the barn. The charge against Fritz Schütt was declared to rest upon the following circumstances : he was the last person seen with the child and, moreover, very near the barn where the corpse was subsequently found ; further, at the presumed time of the crime, his mother met him carrying a mattock in his hand, and, when questioned, he had been unable to furnish a satisfactory explanation ; further, he denied that he had noticed any suspicious circumstances at the time cited though he could not possibly have failed to do so since Anna Scheffel was presumably murdered and concealed close to where Fritz Schütt was working ; finally he had, on various occasions while they were searching for the child, expressed the certainty that she would never be found again.

Counsel for the defence at once objected. The trial against the gipsies had never been brought to a satisfactory conclusion ; witnesses were present who had seen the child Anna Scheffel living among the gipsies ; it was well within the bounds of possibility that the gipsies, having stolen and killed Anna, had hidden her in the barn, close to her father's house, in order to divert suspicions from themselves and direct it against somebody at Treuen. These objections the prosecution met with the testimony of experts, reading statements made by them to the effect that the corpse had been found in a state of mummification and not decomposition. This pointed to the fact that, immediately after the

death, the child had been buried in some airtight place such as the barn would readily provide, more particularly since, after the date of the crime, the barn had been filled with grain, thus completely shutting off air from where the body was buried and favouring the process of mummification. Moreover, for the gipsies to carry a body to the barn during the month of August—for the child seen among the gipsies had been seen in August—was quite impossible. Why ? Because at that time the barn was filled and closed up ; any such action on the part of the gipsies could not have passed unnoticed.

The accused followed all these explanations from beginning to end with unwavering attention ; though he did not invariably grasp the technicalities of the experts' testimony or the formalities of legal procedure, he hung on to the words of every speaker with all the excitement of a child. When he recognised the two little duck-girls among the witnesses, he nodded and smiled at them ; but they blushed and turned their backs. The hearing that day lasted from ten o'clock in the morning to three in the afternoon.

When they brought Fritz back to his cell, he asked the jailer when the session was to begin next day. He looked forward to it with joy ; it filled him with satisfaction to sit in the dock behind a rail which separated him from the rest of the world—a world he had always fled but could now see and hear at a safe distance.

On the morrow, the hearing began at nine and lasted until five, with an interval of ten minutes. But not even this ordeal tired the prisoner. He sat quite motionless in his place, his eyes roaming from one face in the court-room to the other. In spite of the attention with which he followed every detail, he never once allowed himself to be drawn into a sudden exclamation or an untimely word. He spoke only when addressed ; he made the same brief answers to prosecution and defence alike. And once that day, he broke out into his high ringing laugh.

During the cross-examination of Mandelkov, the presiding Judge turned to the prisoner :

" Is it true," he asked, " that you turned pale when witness told you Anna's corpse had been found in the barn ? "

Fritz looked at the judge deliberately, then at the witness, whose smile, as usual, belied the treachery in his glittering eye. He took plenty of time to answer. Then, blithely :

" The master would know that better than I do : I couldn't see my own face."

And he laughed, highly amused at his own wit.

" Is it true that in a conversation with witness, your present master, you accused the Inspector of attempting to make you drunk ? "

" Yes, I said that. He made them give me beer and wine. But he knew I drank only milk, because I'd told him so before." Then, pointing at the Inspector who stood by his side, he added : " He's a very clever gentleman, sir."

The whole court-room burst into laughter ; the Inspector turned away, covered with embarrassment. The Judge called for order ; then resumed his questioning :

" You have said you are innocent. You have insisted upon your innocence. Why, then, did you tell the witness that you would surely get two years' imprisonment ? What made you believe that you deserved to be punished ? "

" I don't remember saying any such thing, sir," Fritz replied. " The master was always getting after me ; he wouldn't let me be. There's a lot he wants to tell even now. You ask him."

Mandelkov, in the witness-box, snarled with rage. The Judge went on :

" Why did you leave your room night after night to sleep on straw in the stable instead of in your own bed ? "

" I don't know," Fritz said, " I like it better. I look after the horses in the daytime, too."

" Why," the Judge pursued, " do you bury the money you have honestly earned and saved, instead of keeping it in your trunk like everyone else."

Fritz flushed.

" I don't know. Once underground, it's put away and done with."

" How do you mean : done with ? "

" I don't know."

" Do you often bury things to be done with them ? "

Fritz made no answer.

" What made you tell your fellow farm-hands at Treuen that the child would certainly never be found again, and that it was safely put away for good and all ? "

" Well, so she was," Fritz answered.

" But how did you know ? "

" I just thought so."

" Did you think very much about her after she had disappeared ? "

" Oh no, sir. There was always a lot of work to do."

Next, they called the two witnesses who had testified in the trial of the gipsies. Their evidence had been unimpeachable. They were now once more put under oath and once again they reiterated their unshakable conviction that the child of the photograph before them was the child they had seen in the gipsies' camp. With this exculpating testimony, the second day of Fritz's trial came to an end.

That night, while the presiding Judge, the prosecution and the defence pored over their briefs all night long, Fritz slept the deep dreamless sleep of the utterly exhausted. On the third day, the proceedings began at nine and went on until ten at night, with two hours of interval. Document after document was written into the record ; examination and cross-examination succeeded one another ; witness after witness was called upon. Only by dint of infinite willpower did the presiding Judge and the attorneys manage to bear the strain ; their intensity communicated an air of feverish suspense, which was in strange contrast with the serenity of the prisoner. So far, nothing had disturbed him ; the questions, exhortations and warnings of Judge and attorneys were powerless to reach him. For that world outside his solitude, raging against him with all the force of its

hard-and-fast laws and words, could never convey any reality to him. He held a different mirror up to Nature ; he saw a different truth reflected in it. Such words as " murder " and " rape " were utterly incomprehensible, incomprehensible as the dark and evil impulses which moved him, as the fierce voluptuous intoxication of murder hidden in his own soul. Long ago, the lost child had become for Fritz a sleep that was past, an embrace dreamed of in unconsciousness. The child's body, the bleached bones and white hollow skull had brought no recollection to him. He had loved and murdered. But he did not know that these were two separate things ; he did not know that he had done them both.

Obscurely, he felt that he was lost, just as the world had been lost for him since that morning when they dragged him away from his sleep and work to bring him to the prison. But the why of it he could not feel or understand. By the same token, the Judge could never understand his obstinate denial, his calm, his aloofness, his serenity.

But on the afternoon of the third day, Christian Scheffel and Emma Schütt, mother of the accused, were called as witnesses. From that moment, the prisoner's attitude underwent a complete change. To be sure, he still preserved his strange calm ; his agitation when he caught sight of the newcomers did not necessarily indicate any sudden consciousness of guilt, nor could the Judge ascribe it to any such impulse. But his dilated eyes, moist and dark with excitement, looked from one to the other, now tender and affectionate, now a prey to suspense and anxiety. His face flushed a deep crimson. At last his gaze fastened on his mother's face, clung to it. And he turned deathly pale.

Emma's cuts and scars were still fresh. They seemed to stream over her brow and cheeks and skin. Terror was written on her face, and the threat of evil. She cast a hurried glance in his direction, but already bitter tears had risen to her eyes and gushed in a surging hot flood over the network of scars to fall upon her breast. Amazingly, then, the son lifted his hands slowly to the railings of the dock,

folded them together, and, with eyes full of entreaty and anxious sorrow, hung upon his mother's words.

Christian Scheffel appeared first. His tall figure, prematurely stooped, had grown young and erect again ; his broad shoulders seemed ready once more to bear care and burden ; but his face, framed with white hair and beard, was the face of an old man. His grief, dead at length, had traced deep furrows on his skin ; his lofty brow was creased with wrinkles, earned in a struggle in which he had found neither victory nor mercy ; only his eyes seemed alive, his eyes ashine with the still glow of utter humility, whenever he raised the lids that lay heavy over them as a stone lies over a tomb. He gave his testimony in a low, calm voice. When they asked him about the accused, he said he had always considered him an honest, hard-working lad, with nothing whatever wicked about him.

The Judge asked :

" In the light of what we have learned, do you consider the prisoner guilty ? "

" I cannot decide that," Christian answered, " I am not a judge."

" For a whole year, you made the greatest sacrifices, you went to infinite trouble in order to find out what had happened to your unfortunate child. Would you not feel a certain satisfaction if Justice were at last to find the answer to your tragic question ? And if Justice were at last to punish the heinous crime, in so far as human justice is able ? "

" No," Christian replied, " I could feel no satisfaction in that, nor could I find an explanation for the death of my unfortunate child, even if the accused were to be proven guilty. No punishment, either, could ever atone for that death."

Then, suddenly, Emma leaped up from her seat, and, standing beside her Master, cried in a loud voice :

" He's guilty. Punish him, punish him. You must punish him."

Her scars gleamed like fiery snakes ; tears poured down

over her face ; her lips twitched. Fritz, too, jumped up and stood staring at his mother. The court-room rose in tumult ; the Judge called for order ; Christian led Emma back to her place, patted her shoulder and sought to calm her. The defence asked for a pause in order that the witness might recover her self-control before giving her painful testimony. Court was adjourned for two hours. Fritz was taken back to his cell, where he sat cowering on his stool, his hands over his drooping head as though to protect it. He left his meal untouched ; when they came to call him, he seemed to be sleeping.

The trial was resumed. The defence now raised the question of the mattock. Might not the accused have made use of the mattock—which his mother saw in his hand and upon which her whole accusation rested—simply to chase away the old beggar who had appeared at the farm at the time cited ?

The beggar was an old gipsy. When the trial of the band was over and he was released, he went to Treuen and stayed there until Fritz's trial. The defence asked that his evidence be heard before they cross-examined Emma.

The old man was led in. He was covered from head to foot with a crust of mud and filth still thicker, if possible, than before. Over his face, hair, hands and clothing lay a cake of grime, stuck over with blades of straw and bits of rubbish from the stables and dung-heaps on which he slept. His mark of identification, the wound on his neck, had disappeared under the dirt ; the Court usher had to scrape the place clean before he could be identified. He walked with difficulty ; his feet, wrapped in unrecognisable rags and shreds of leather, seemed, with each step, to grow down into the earth and to rise again with extreme difficulty. On the other hand, he talked fluently now and laughed a great deal ; his dark sharp eyes gleamed out of a face almost completely hidden by his beard and filth. He recognised the accused at once and pointed a menacing finger at him. The Judge set a photograph of the yard at Treuen before him and asked him whether he could show from what

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direction the accused had come towards him with a mattock. Immediately he indicated the side of the barn that faced the garden.

" And what was the accused doing with the mattock when he saw you ? "

" Oh, he tried to go for me with it, the bad 'un. Ay, he's a bad 'un, I tell ye. I'm an old man ; I have to steal sometimes ; there's nothin' agin an old man stealin' an apple or two in the summer-time, with 'em all hangin' on the trees as ye go by. People has always stole apples, Judge, ye know that, ye know what I mean. But to go for ye with a mattock. . . . No, Judge, I say that's goin' too far ! "

" Did you notice where the accused went with his mattock afterwards ? "

" I turned my back to 'im, Judge, like 'e was the Devil. Better have 'im behind than in front, said I. I run like all hell was after me, and once I turned roun', and he was standin' by the well, laughin'. He's a pretty fellow to look at, Judge, but he's a bad 'un, ay, a bad 'un."

" And you noticed nothing else, nothing special ? "

" Nothin' at all, sir, nothin' at all. The yard was empty . . . looked like good pickin's. . . . I could have copped two apples easy and maybe more."

" You had better be careful, my good man," the Judge warned him. " You come up against the law when you steal. Don't you know that it is wrong to steal ? "

" Oh, yes, Judge, I know that." His black eyes sparkled with pleasure as he spoke. " It's wrong, Judge, and I know it."

The Judge controlled himself and went on calmly :

" And you saw nothing of the child that disappeared that day ? Nothing at all ? "

" No, there waren't no child anywhere about, worse luck, or I'd have got the apples given to me. No, there waren't no sign of a child runnin' about in that yard nor any shoutin' or screamin' to hear, neither. I know what ye mean ; ye've all been askin' me about the child all the time, but I got no child, Judge, never did have, not when

I was young, neither. No, I'm nobody's daddy, no, Judge, not me ! "

His sally met with general laughter. But the defence had established that there was no proof that the accused had actually entered the barn with a mattock.

Once again Emma was brought in. She was calm now ; the hearing took its normal course. The Judge began :

" You know, I suppose, that, as mother of the accused, you have the right to refuse to say anything which may be prejudicial to his cause ? "

" Yes."

" Yet you appeared at the preliminary examination as State's witness and were the first to express suspicion of your son's guilt in so heinous a crime ? "

" Yes."

" Do you still maintain that suspicion ? " the Judge asked.

" Yes."

" And you are prepared to waive your right as a mother by which you may refuse to give damaging evidence against your son ? "

" Yes."

" Do you wish to take the oath ? "

" Yes."

The Judge had them swear Emma in ; as she repeated the words of the oath, she gripped the plain crucifix with both her hands.

" Will you tell us the reason for your suspicion ? "

" What reasons ? "

" Well, what makes you so certain that your son is guilty of the murder of Anna Scheffel ? "

" Because I know."

" Yes, but how do you know ? Did you see the deed ? "

" I didn't see anything."

" Then tell us when the suspicion first occurred to you ? "

" When they found the child, I had to fetch the mattock. I took it in my hands and I ran towards the barn with it. Then I knew."

" So it was the mattock that reminded you that you had seen your son with it a year before ? "

" Yes. When I held the mattock in my hand and ran into the barn, it swung to and fro, like when I saw him with it."

" From which direction did your son come that day ? "

" He was standing in the doorway."

" Did anything arouse your suspicion then ? "

" No."

" During the whole past year, then, you neither noticed nor suspected anything strange in the behaviour of your son ? "

" No."

" Did he behave well towards you ? "

" He was good and gentle. He did his work."

" Did you ever talk to him about the disappearance of the child ? "

" We prayed together. We prayed that she might be found."

" Your son prayed with you ? "

" Yes, he prayed and sang with me."

" Then your suspicion is in reality just a surmise, or, let us say, an instinct ? Yet you are able to make an accusation against him that might well bring him to the scaffold ? "

" He is a murderer."

" He is your son."

" That's how I know."

" I don't understand you," the Judge said.

" I know it. That's why I want to die. I can't go on living."

" I see. You were so convinced of your son's guilt that you attempted to commit suicide ? Now, supposing he were guilty, can you think of any good reason why he should have murdered the child ? "

" I know why he did."

" Well ? "

" I can't tell it in front of people."

" Will you tell it to the Court ? "

" Yes."

The room was cleared, the public excluded from the hearing. In a low voice, tenderly almost, the presiding Judge asked Emma :

" Well, now, tell us why you believed the accused committed that terrible deed ? "

" He had to. Something drove him to it."

" Have you ever noticed any improper behaviour in him before ? "

" No ; never."

" Then you can't tell us the reason ? "

" I'll tell you everything, because he must be punished. It started with his father : he threw me down and set upon me and I couldn't defend myself. Then I had the child. But he was a good child and sweet in his ways ; he was beautiful, too, beautiful. But one day he took sick and I washed him all over ; I saw him naked ; he wasn't a child any longer, he was a man. And he was bad ; I knew the black evil that was in him. He wasn't my child any longer ; I was afraid of him. Then when I fetched the mattock, I knew it all, Judge. They ought to have killed me then and there ; they should kill him and me, too, now, for he's my child, after all. Ay, that would be best."

Suddenly she turned towards her son so that he might look full into her white, lacerated face. The indomitable love of a mother for her young spoke to him in her glance ; her heart, bruised and wounded as her face, swelled with ineffable tenderness.

" Don't lie, Fritz," she begged him. " Don't lie. Let them kill you, let them strike you dead ; you don't know yourself how bad you are ! I'd tell you, but I don't know how to. It's a terrible thing, but when you want your joy of anything, you always find it through evil. You don't understand that : it's that Nature has turned bad in you. You must never grow up to be a man, for everything you did would be evil, evil ! Don't lie, Fritz, let them kill you rather. And if you die, I'll die, too, because you are my child."

She advanced slowly towards the barrier ; with a rough gesture of longing, she crushed the boy's head to her great breast, pressing his face against her heart, close, closer, with all her strength, with the desire to suffocate him there, to draw the breath out of him with the fierce beating of her heart. In vain Fritz struggled against her iron embrace ; it took two policemen to tear mother and son apart. Fritz's breath came in gasps ; the blood burned in his face ; he could scarcely breathe as he drew himself up. Emma, sobbing, sank down, exhausted. The Judge turned to the accused :

" Have you any answer to make ? "

Fritz, still panting, his eyes red and swollen in his flushed face, burst out :

" I didn't do it. I didn't do anything."

The witness was dismissed, the public readmitted. It was night when the trial ended : the verdict was to be given on the morrow. Worn out with the strain, the Judge and the attorneys slept but a few hours ; they had exhausted all resources yet now in the solemn hour of judgment, they could not see the truth clearly. After long months spent in hearing witnesses, in extracting evidence, in submerging his entire existence in his task, until he himself seemed to have lived the fearful deed, the Judge, in this ultimate hour, pondered the guilt of the accused and the verdict he must give with the same uncertainty that he had brought to the task on the first day.

That night too the prisoner slept soundly. But the sight of his mother's scarred face, and more, her terrible words, had moved him to the depths of his soul. For he had heard them less as words than read them as signs, blood-witness to his own blood, revealing his inmost spirit not to others but to himself. They were the first sparks of that flame which was to arise within him, to destroy his sinister blood and the murderous passion it inspired, gradually to lighten his darkness and lead his soul to knowledge of itself.

His first sensation was one of fear. His mother sought the bitterest punishment for him and he was lost. Nothing

would ever be the same again ; he would have to submit to whatever *they* cared to do to him. He stood in the moonlight in the middle of his cell ; he turned his pale face towards the bright disc that swung low against the bars like a face, wealed with scars, looking into his own. He undressed, threw his clothes on the floor. It grew colder ; he crept under the rough covers of his cot.

The next morning, all the while he was dressing, he laughed through a half-sleep that he could not shake off ; but gradually wakefulness and the consciousness of punishment brought him to his senses. The last session of the trial began at eight o'clock. But now Fritz listened to lawyers and witnesses no longer. His only thought was of the moment when he would see his mother again, for it was from her he expected his sentence. Witnesses were called who had seen Anna Scheffel in the gipsy caravan ; after they had been heard for the last time, the Judge, at great length, explained that in his opinion their evidence, based on their recollection of pictures and on their mere memories, was less valid, there being a greater margin of uncertainty, than the evidence of the witnesses who had identified the corpse and its clothing. The prosecution and defence thereupon made speeches that lasted hours.

At six o'clock at night, the Court declared, in view of all the facts and evidence available, that the accused, Fritz Schütt, had deliberately and with intent killed Anna Scheffel on June 24th, and that he had thereby incurred the maximum sentence for murder : fifteen years' imprisonment. Summing up, the Judge ascribed the mildness of the sentence to the fact that, at the time of the crime, the prisoner was under eighteen years of age.

Exhausted by the length of the trial, the public and the accused himself heard the verdict without particular pity or apathy. Fritz had risen with an air of quiet indifference ; he was about to leave the court-room when Mandelkov appeared before him. In a voice of shrill entreaty, speaking so all might hear :

" Go on," he cried. " Speak, can't you ? They can't do

anything more to you. Tell them all you did it. Confess ! "

Before the Judge had time to call him to order, the people had paused, the shuffle of exit had died down ; all eyes were fastened on the prisoner. Fritz looked down at his late master calmly, thrust his hands deep into his pockets, and said very slowly, very deliberately :

" I have nothing to say. I didn't do anything."

Then he turned, to go back to his cell. A tumult of voices, loud in indignation or dismay, rose behind him.

CHAPTER VIII

When Fritz reached his cell, an immense weariness fell upon him. He could not make up his mind to take off his clothes before lying down on his hard bed ; he could not sleep, either. He thought of his mother, of her failure to come that day, and of his sentence. No, he would not be struck dead, even though his mother wished it ; but he would surely be sentenced to hard labour. No doubt they would bind him in chains, never allow him to go where he willed, or move about, or hide in a corner, if the desire seized him ; he would remain tied up to the middle of a wall. Worst of all, any Tom, Dick or Harry would have access to him and the right to disturb him ; it occurred to him, too, that if his hands were bound fast in an iron ring, he would have to be dressed and undressed by the jailer, he would be unable to reach with his hands, even for the least of physical necessities. This notion filled him with a horror of the punishment he was to face. He sprang up from his bed, dashed to the door. His desire to escape was so compelling that he banged against the door with his fists and could not understand why they would not open. He groped along the wall of his cell, seeking an exit ; he could not utter a word ; his heart thumped in his breast ; perspiration trickled cold down his back.

Suddenly he found himself standing opposite the window. The milky light of a full moon shone upon him ; the moon was an immobile, flat face, slashed with streaks and scars, a cold, still, burned-out planet. Gazing upon it, he lost himself : from the white radiance of moonlight that fell upon his childlike face, a stream of cold flowed like the breath of icy death through his heart, whose beating grew more distant, like the echo of departing steps. His strength deserted him ; he fell to the floor in a heap.

The next morning, the jailer found him lying there in a deep slumber, his limbs rigid with cold. The man rubbed his hands over Fritz's body to warm and awaken him ; although still half-asleep, Fritz rose to his feet violently and with a sense of horror, as quickly as his stiff joints permitted. The jailer had turned aside ; he watched Fritz out of the corner of his eye ; then he left the cell, without a word. Fritz, deeply troubled, sat down on the edge of his bed. On awakening, he felt his limbs heavy as chains upon him ; the sensation of the jailer's hands upon him had brought him relief ; he believed that he had already finished serving his sentence. Slowly he ate the warm soup they gave him for breakfast ; it stirred him and limbered him up. Yet his oppression and worry would not leave him.

The morrow was a Sunday. Prisoners still standing trial were allowed to walk up and down the long passage while their cells were being cleaned. Often they would be able to exchange a few words, though in very low tones, lest the jailer hear them. Fritz had so far made no use of this opportunity. He felt no urge to freedom or movement or, least of all, society. To-day, however, moved to the depths of his soul by fear, he slunk toward the open door of his cell and peered furtively down the long, damp, lighted corridor. One by one, he watched the prisoners pass, as they trooped by, seeking to make the most of each step they took ; then, suddenly determined, he fell in step with a young man, who walked with slow, yet buoyant and light step. He looked like Gustav, the son of the master of Treuen ; he had dark hair and a pale thin face, wasted by indecision and bitter melancholy. He looked at Fritz out of his dark eyes but did not speak. Fritz was at first amazed, then more and more tortured by the realisation that he was bound by an inward link to another man through merely walking along with him in step ; he resented this and immediately sought to lose the other, to escape ; he attempted to quicken his step, but the space between the different prisoners was so slight, that he found himself treading on the heels of the man ahead of him. Forced to slow up, he

found himself once again walking in time with the prisoner who looked like Gustav Scheffel. A fierce wrath and a helpless fear gripped him ; the sweat poured down over his brow ; he was thinking it would perhaps have been better after all if he had been struck down, as his mother had wished. At last, having finally choked down his scorn and fear, he whispered to the other hoarsely, with extreme difficulty :

" I was sentenced yesterday."

The other allowed his melancholy, dark eyes to fall on Fritz, but he spoke no word.

" Hard labour is a terrible thing, eh ? "

The prisoner shrugged his shoulders :

" People deserve it," he said in a sombre, piteous voice.

" But surely they must take off your chains in the evening when you lie down on your wooden bed . . . when you have to undress. . . . Surely you must be able to do that for yourself. . . . Adults hate to undress people. . . . Even a mother doesn't like to do it when her child is grown up. . . . That I know, now."

" I don't know what you mean," the other replied with a smile. " But if you mean that you will be bound helpless in chains in hard labour, you're wrong. They do that only rarely . . . if you're violent, for instance. . . . But in general they let you move about as freely as you do here . . . as freely as you can, in a prison. . . . " As he spoke, the prisoner smiled and cast a kindly glance at the jailer who approached them.

" You know that ? You know it for sure ? "

" Yes, of course it's true. . . . "

Without further questioning, Fritz, with one bound, moved out of the line and rushed back to his cell. He stood there, panting, his hand on his throbbing heart. The jailer entered :

" What's the matter ? " he asked. " You needn't take on so. You're not sentenced to hard labour, but simply to imprisonment. That's no different than here, and you're pretty comfortably off here, aren't you ? "

Fritz looked at the jailer ; his glance was childlike and filled with joy :

" Then I haven't been sentenced to hard labour ? " he asked softly.

The jailer shook his head.

Fritz's glance fell to the ground. Softly his body trembled, a flush came over his face, tears darted from his eyes. The jailer moved slowly away towards the door and stood there. After a moment, Fritz whispered :

" Can I serve my sentence at once ? "

" Yes, certainly. You must present yourself to the officials and personally declare that you do not protest against the sentence."

" Oh, I see."

" Shall I report that you are willing to appear to-morrow ? "

" Yes."

" Very well, I'll do it. Your sentence was a mild one."

" Yes, it's a mild sentence," Fritz repeated.

" I'm glad you're looking at things that way. I shall make my report," the jailer said, as he left the cell.

Fritz walked up and down with light, glad step, breathing deep through the sobs that rose from his choking throat, wiping the damp traces of his tears with the back of his hand. For the first time, he was racked with emotion ; for the first time in his life, he really wept. Evil had turned into good for him, fear into joy. The jailer's kindly words still rang in his ears and triumphed over the evil threats of his mother. For the first time, too, he felt himself to be a man among men, he found in men not only enemies who persecuted him, frightening him out of his refuge of work and sleep, but also friends, who rendered him good service when he expected the worst from them. Gratitude swept him off his feet. He ceased to pace idly up and down, he fell to the basket-weaving they had given him, putting a feverish industry into his work as though, by doing so, he had a means at hand to give thanks for everything. Tired from his work, exhausted by the excitement, he slept

soundly that night. On the following day, they took him before the authorities. With a happy smile, he listened to the clerk as he told him he still had the right to carry his case to two higher courts of justice.

" I wish to serve my sentence," he said.

" In other words, you are willing to make a confession now."

" No. I have come only to ask permission to serve my sentence."

" Well then, what sort of declaration do you wish to make ? "

" I don't know what I must say," Fritz replied helplessly.

The clerk and Fritz conferred together on the wording of Fritz's statement. The text, drawn up in the formal phraseology of the clerk, with here and there a personal expression of the prisoner's, read as follows :

" *I hereby beg to submit to the sentence passed upon me on December 6th of this year and to be allowed at once to begin to serve the fifteen years of imprisonment to which I was sentenced. I realise I cannot get off this punishment and I therefore wish to suffer it at once.*"

Fritz signed his name at the bottom of the paper in large, carefully traced characters. As soon as this declaration was filed, his imprisonment pending sentence was immediately made to apply as part of his sentence.

The next week passed favourably ; the prisoner was quiet and cheerful. He worked and sang, kept his cell spotlessly clean and, with a naïve sort of pleasure, put on his prisoner's garb. On the third day after he had filed his declaration, the Prison Chaplain visited him. As he entered the cell, Fritz felt radiantly happy. He blushed continually ; he followed every gesture and listened to every word of the Chaplain's with glistening eyes. It was a source of immense pride to him that a clergyman—until then he had never seen a clergyman save from a distance and always in common with other people ; always the clergyman had stood high above the others, on the altar or in the pulpit,

in a ceremonious church—now came to him, Fritz, alone in his cell, stood on common ground with him, sat down on his bench, while Fritz stood over him.

The Chaplain was convinced of the prisoner's guilt. He was therefore amazed to find such a desire to pray and such an attention in the murderer of an innocent child. He firmly hoped to bring the sinner to repentance, the murderer to confession. The first day he tested his temper ; they said the Lord's Prayer together, the Creed and the Ten Commandments. The Chaplain noticed how quietly, how piously the murderer's lips framed the Commandment : " Thou shalt not kill." But he did not lose heart.

" I must awaken his conscience first," he thought. Then :

" Do you often think of God ? " he asked.

" It's a long time since I went to church," Fritz answered contritely.

" God is everywhere ; He is omniscient and all-seeing. He can see your every deed ; He knows your every thought. You must fear God."

" Yes."

" When you have roused God's ire, when you have broken His Commandments—or merely one of His Commandments—then you may well tremble before the wrath of His punishment, for it shall be more fearful by far than the punishment of man."

" Yes."

" Think of God, too, my boy. Think of Him before you go to sleep at night. Think of your horrible sin. Think of God's punishment that will strike you. Then pray."

" Yes."

" Very well, my child. In common fear and worship of God the Almighty, let us sing together the hymn ' Tremble, my soul, before God's mighty wrath.' "

The Chaplain led off ; Fritz, in his clear, ringing voice, rose joyously above the hoarse tones of the other. He sang more too, as though he were alone ; he remembered all the hymns he had sung with his mother in the summertime, when everything was happiness.

Dusk fell early ; but the snow, floating down in thick, creamy flakes, lightened the cell. Fritz lay down in the cold, put his hands under the blanket, thought of the Chaplain and fell to praying. He recalled the Chaplain's words : " God can see your every deed," and he trembled. But, in a vision in her sleep, his mother had seen everything, too, even such things as one must hide from oneself. Fritz longed to pray to God and to Emma, his mother ; yet in the midst of his exaltation, he fell asleep, his hands folded over his loins.

He dreamed. In his dream, he sank waist-high into a warm, steaming mist, thick and sticky as a bog ; it surrounded his body and beat against it in intangible, soft waves ; meanwhile his head sank, and an iron hand pressed his head from above down against his heart. It finally rested there, on his heart, severed wholly from his neck yet alive, possessing ears that could hear his heartbeats, eyes that could look down upon his invisible body that dissolved now in colourless, billowing waves. The mist grew thicker, whiter ; it collected, piling cloud upon cloud, and through it, from below, rose the picture of his mother. Now, suddenly, the red scars on her face gleamed evilly at him ; her lips were parted, she opened her eyes and stared at him . . . stared. . . . Then, as he pushed his hands downward, between the glance of his mother and that of his own head, on his heart, his fingers separated to enclose the network of scars upon his mother's face. These scars began to live of themselves, rising and falling, twisting like fiery snakes, while the face disappeared. At once, his head sprang back, his heart beat freely, he opened his eyes, and, after a long time, realised he was awake.

His cell shone white in the moonlight. Everything about him was still, solemn. " God can see your every deed," he thought, and hastily withdrew his hands from under the blanket, laying them carefully over it. Again, he thought : "I want to serve my sentence," then he fell asleep once more.

The following morning, he had no clear recollection of his dream, but he still felt exhausted ; his limbs were

heavy and painful. His mother's face threatened to arise everywhere ; he could not drive her from his mind. He remained quite still ; he did not sing, but he worked with great industry. On Sunday morning, the Chaplain came to see him ; they prayed and sang together.

" Have you been thinking of God ? " the Chaplain asked.

" I have thought of Him every evening."

" Do you realise how great your sin is in His eyes ? " the Chaplain went on.

" Yes."

" Do you realise what Commandment you have broken ? Do you realise in what way you have offended the Lord ? "

Fritz was silent.

" Now let me hear you say the Ten Commandments."

Fritz did so.

" Very good. I want you to reflect every evening and to ask yourself in all fear and humility which of God's holy commands you have broken. You must know this, acknowledge and repent. Do you understand me ? "

" I must know and repent."

" Will you do as I say ? " the Chaplain asked.

" Remember that God punishes severely whosoever shall break His Commandments. But, if you acknowledge your sin and repent, then through Christ's mercy you may be saved. Acknowledge your sin, I say, and repent ! "

" Yes."

" And walk for ever in fear of God's punishment."

" The punishment is a mild one."

" Man's punishment, my son, you mean man's punishment. Ay, man's punishment is light, for it strikes only the body. But God's punishment is terrible, for it strikes the soul, your soul, the thing that is eternal within you, imperishable good and everlasting evil. You must rescue the good in you. But you will be committed to the evil in you unless you bow to God's Holy Commandments and acknowledge such sins as you commit against these Commandments. I am seeking to lead you to God, to His punishment and to His mercy."

" Yes," Fritz whispered, his eyes shining. The Chaplain left him ; the man of God was deeply moved and he had great hopes of bringing the criminal finally to confess.

That Sunday, in the afternoon, the jailer came to tell Fritz that his father was there and wished to see him ; filled with surprise, Fritz followed the jailer into the visitors' cell. He had never thought of his father ; he knew nothing about him ; he had even forgotten their meeting, during Fritz's childhood, when he had bitten the hand his father proffered. Now, through the bars, he saw a colossus ; a pale, huge face lost in a red, dirty beard ; and small, moist eyes.

As Fritz appeared, his father burst into loud roars of laughter. Mirth tore his wide, colourless mouth apart, his jaws fell, revealing a yawning cavern ; with every breath he took, his laughter increased, until at last his son, with no thought or sensation, laughed softly back. At last the father grew quiet, and, gathering his breath, managed to bring out the words :

" You scum ! Ha, that's my son, that scum ! Do you know me ? Why don't you bite me now, eh ? Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha ! Why did you get yourself locked up ? Aren't you ashamed of yourself ? "

" My sentence is a mild one," Fritz said simply.

" That's what your mother says, I suppose."

Fritz made no answer.

" You bloody fool ! Your mother is the sort of woman who understands nothing about a man ; she doesn't want to know anything about men, do you see ? You let me tell you what's what ! I'm your father ; I've not forgotten you. God's truth, I'm glad you've come to such a pass. Now listen : you haven't made a confession, eh ? Because you needn't worry about the verdict. You must appeal, understand ? To appeal, that's the thing to do ; the lawyer for the defence said so. I spoke to him ; that's his opinion and mine, too. Do you understand ? To-morrow is the time to do it, see ? I'm your father, and I tell you you must file an appeal."

" If the punishment is too harsh," Fritz said, his eyes

caught in the glance of the watery, small eyes that gazed at him, his will swayed by the evil force in them. " If the punishment is too harsh, then I shall appeal, yes, I will file an application, yes, you are my father."

" Quite right," the other said. " You do that. I shall tell the lawyer."

He looked his son up and down ; his long, thick, parted lips trembled and his voice, until then even, now trembled also :

" You look like your mother," he said, " You're a handsome lad, yes, as handsome as your mother. But inside, you're your father, what ? "

Fritz looked at him earnestly in silence.

" Well, good-bye, scum," the father said suddenly, in a loud sonorous voice. Then he turned and walked away with heavy, stamping tread.

Fritz returned to his cell, his cheeks aflame, his blood feverish within him. He walked up and down raging, whistling so loud that the jailer was forced to beg him to desist. He threw his work in one corner. It was late when he fell asleep, and very early in the morning he was clamouring to be brought before the authorities. At about noon, they took him to the office of the Courts, where he filed a second statement :

> " *I hereby beg to state that I have changed my mind ; I withdraw my previous declaration in which I affirmed that I was content with my sentence and I hereby appeal against the judgment passed upon me on December 6th of this year.*"

This declaration was duly filed through the attorney for the defence ; it came up in the middle of March.

In the meantime, the prisoner changed in every way. Immediately after his father's visit, Fritz's obstinate temper was quite clear to his jailer. To be sure the lad worked even more industriously than before, keeping his cell as immaculate as ever ; but he no longer greeted or even spoke to his jailer, and, time and again, he had to be reprimanded

for singing and whistling. The Chaplain was most disappointed in him, when, instead of simply confessing, he applied for a revision of his sentence. Moreover the prisoner now rejected the Chaplain's words of advice the moment they aimed at his deed and the confession and repentance that must come from it. Yet he would listen to his prayers, particularly at Christmas, with obvious meditation and happiness. The Chaplain began to notice that religion was of importance to the prisoner only on Sundays and holidays and when he was idle ; for a long time he pondered the problem and was forced to acknowledge ruefully that he would never succeed in leading this soul to God, as he himself understood God. The heart of this sinner was simply not inclined to God. Yet surely God must be inclined toward this sinner's soul ? The God of the parable must hover protectingly over Fritz, else why should this murderer be invoking God, calling upon His name with faith and joy, without trembling before His wrath or being rent by the torments of repentance ? So the Chaplain ceased speaking about the actual murder ; when he prayed with the prisoner, he subordinated himself, he allowed the lad to select the passages in the Bible he wished to read or the hymns he wished to sing. And all the while, no pang of conscience troubled the murderer. The mere sight of his father, the sound of his words and his laughter in Fritz's ears had brought back to the latter his cold, stolid stupidity and his aimless serenity. In a general way, the ghastly memory of his mother had vanished, though at times, in truth, it returned. If the father had spawned this child in his evil merciless lust, the strength of the mother, who had nourished the child in her womb, once more rose out of the sleep of his unconsciousness.

Amid darkness, in loneliness, even in sleep, the murderer had so far been self-sufficient ; he forgot his trials in working, in singing, in cleaning his cell, in laughter, in obstinate thoughts, in dreams. If occasionally he might think of the vision of his mother, her scarred face swimming mistily before his eyes, it was never with his heart or soul. And

again, out of his body, fear came to him ; he was terrified of himself.

He had steadfastly refused to bathe with the prisoners on Sunday, a peculiarly striking piece of wilfulness, since most of his fellows were only too pleased at an opportunity to feel free for a few hours, to run about naked, to sport and frolic in the water. The authorities made no comment on his refusal, believing it right to encourage isolation in view of the prisoner's very special case. On bathdays, he was given a wooden tub filled with lukewarm water ; he bathed in his cell. He would undress with closed eyes, his lips clenched, his breath bated, so that he should see or feel nothing of his own body. He wound the towel with which he washed tight as a glove about his hand to avoid moving his body with his naked hand. When he undressed at night, he would go straight under the blanket ; in the morning, he reached for his clothes while still in bed. As he fell asleep, he laid his hands folded over his blanket, cold as the cell was and numb as they grew. At night, frozen, he might, to be sure, bring them back under the covering, but he would always bury them in the hollow between his back and his hard mattress. Doubled up, thoroughly uncomfortable, he could no longer sleep the dead slumber of old nor lose himself in the subconscious world of dreams. Thoughts came back to torture him ; he would cheat them by thinking of his work and inventing a new pattern for his reed-weaving, representing the stars and the sphere. He would think of his father, too ; the wild, evil voice in which he had spoken of his mother would resound in his ears. As he recalled both father and mother, he understood how he was, indeed, the child of both the man who begot and the woman who bore him. Next he conjured up memories of the birth of animals at Treuen ; in a swift vision, he saw his parents locked in an embrace, the father pressing with powerful knees against the mother, her face buried in the earth. He imagined his father's pale, giant face rising triumphantly, distorted in laughter. But then his mother's image rose ; he saw her walking quietly across

the yard at Treuen, looked into her gentle face ; the home of his childhood passed across his consciousness and Karl and Gustav . . . Martha . . . Christian . . . What a good master Christian had been to him ! As he saw once more his fine, tall figure, his noble face, his self-reliant ways, Fritz grew humble. He would believe he was obeying Christian on days when he worked more quietly and keenly; he never asked for news of his application for a revision of his sentence ; indeed, his rebellion was completely forgotten.

At Christmas time, he received a package of cakes, without knowing that it came from Christian Scheffel. On the second holiday, he was once again taken to the visitors' cell. Fritz was desperately afraid he must see his father again. But this time it was not the latter's pale, giant face ; now Fritz saw Mandelkov, the magistrate, his master, with his meagre hunched body pressed close against the bars and his little sly face close to him. Mandelkov, too, laughed at him, but his was a soft titter. He spoke in muffled tones, flustered, tremendously excited :

" Well, have you had a good Christmas, my lad ? " he asked.

Fritz did not answer.

" You won't speak ? Not even to me ? " he asked again.

For a long time, he looked at Fritz, pain and evil appearing at once in his face. Then he went on :

" I brought you money. We cleared the dung out of the stable and we found your hoard."

Without removing his eyes from Fritz's face, he took the five-mark pieces, wrapped in paper, out of his pocket.

" I don't need any money here," Fritz told him.

" You're not allowed to have money here, you foolish lad," Mandelkov tittered. " I know what's what in this place ; I know how a prison is run, even if I've never been an inmate. You may have a look at the money now, though. Then I'll take it and leave it at the Warden's Office presently. The Warden will take the best care of it until you can get it and bury it again. Poor lad, you're always burying things and other people go and unearth them, eh ? "

He leered, pushed his head through the bars ; his gaze, from between narrowed lids, shone razor-thin. Fritz recoiled in fear, though there were bars between them ; but, from his point of vantage, tossed his head disdainfully. A film of rage glazed Mandelkov's eye ; he began to speak volubly :

" Aha, you're proud, now, eh? You're proud because you've appealed ? But what for ? Lord, what a drivelling idiot you are ! They're not trying to execute you. Why didn't you sit tight, when everything was over ? You should have told all in the beginning. Really, you're a frightful fool ! In your place, I would have told them everything, I would have told them exactly how everything happened and just what sort of a fellow I was. . . . You're always quiet ; you never speak. Take my advice : speak out, tell all you know. Then things will go easy. Umhum ! So you bury that too, eh ? Where do you bury what's inside you ? "

He ceased speaking, drew his breath in, filled his narrow chest ; his eyes were wide, now, and glittering, passionate, moist. Fritz could find no word in answer. Again and again, Mandelkov moved, drawing his head forward and back through the bars. Eventually, he asked :

" Now tell me how things are going with you ? "

" It's a light sentence they gave me," Fritz answered.

" Yes, a good sentence, a good sentence."

Mandelkov's voice, his face suddenly seemed to be extinguished ; he gazed, wide-eyed ; he moved softly to one side, then stood quite still. A heavy silence fell upon the cell ; no glance was exchanged, no word ; neither moved. Finally, the jailer rose from his seat, walked menacingly towards Mandelkov. The latter came to his senses, ignored Fritz, and, in a tired voice :

" I gave him the best advice," he said to the jailer, " but the lad is stubborn. Some day, he will speak . . . yes, some day he will speak."

With these words, he left, and Fritz returned to his cell. He gave no further thought to Mandelkov's parting speech, since the deed he had committed in no way urged him to

unburden himself. Next day Mandelkov's body was found lying on the moor. His servants, searching for him, were surprised to find a string tied about his foot and made fast against the trigger of his gun. He had shot himself in the mouth.

That winter passed very swiftly. At the end of February, the sky had already cleared ; at midday, the air was light, the heavens sunny. The fragrance of spring and earth pressed through into the cell in powerful, rich waves ; Fritz's calm rose, amid the swell and growth of Nature, to a happiness that originated within himself. As he stood in the sunlight, his eyes closed, his head thrown back, his hands behind his back, as in sleep, he would sing out as he had in the old days. So moving, so tender his song was, that the jailer found it difficult to bid him desist. But when he sang too loud or too long, the jailer had but to enter his cell and Fritz would cease. For he was as shy of men as ever. To walk in common with the other prisoners was a torture to him ; he never spoke to a soul. With downcast eyes, lips drawn tight, hands hidden and twitching in the folds of his smock, he walked with his fellows, but his step was embarrassed, faltering, and he was always the first to rush back to his cell. From himself, too, he hid with anxious care.

One night he awoke to find himself gasping, tortured by thirst. It had been a sunny Spring day ; now, the cell was icy cold. Amazed, he felt his heart beating as though from afar in dull, muffled beats ; his mouth was parched, his tongue close to his palate. He rose, took his paralysed hands from behind his back ; then he fumbled about for his water-jug and drank. Yet he could not manage, somehow, to drink the water in quick, avid gulps. His first gulp passed cool and refreshing over his parched mouth and filled him with well-being ; his dry tongue, awakened to sensation again, sought the cool water gratefully. At last, pressing softly, Fritz brought the water to flow directly on his throat. Then he laughed, the old voiceless laugh, terrible to behold.

There was no moon ; the cell was pitch black. The sky, strewn with a few tiny, white stars, without light or glow, hung over the little window ; the air was still, motionless, cold. In this hour that hovered between night and morning there seemed to be no sense of either life or death. The prisoner's laughter ceased ; a chill rose from the floor, whipping his legs and back like reeds. His heart seemed to beat no longer. Exhausted, as though dead, he fell into a syncope that was not sleep nor yet wakefulness. The water-jug fell from his hand ; the water, streaming over his neck, shoulders and back, made the cold even more intense. Suddenly he whispered :

" O Lord, I have borne much ! "

When he awoke again, it was early dawn. The sky was no longer close to the little window ; the clouds loomed high in the dim white air ; a light rustle, like the breath of a soft wind or the patter of gentle rain, rang through the stillness, and, from very far, the echo of human sounds, of human steps walking the earth. With difficulty, Fritz raised his stiff body from the cold floor of the cell. His shirt on his back was wet through ; puddles of water gleamed darkly up at him from the floor. Suddenly he remembered the pond at Treuen ; then, too, he recalled, he had borne reeds that had whipped his neck and shoulders, his back and his legs. But no—now he had merely lain on the cold floor, whereas that other time, he had gone out into the hot summer sunshine ! Quickly, he seized his towel and dried up the water on the floor ; then he took off his shirt and spread it out, the moist back upward, on his bed, lying down upon it, while he laid out the wet towel over his belly. Thus he could dry out everything and set things right. Embedded in the wet, cold cloth, he fell asleep again, to be awakened by the jailer.

It was the full dawn of a lovely spring day. The sun rose early in the air, clear yet glassy still with wintry cold. It glittered, shedding warm, caressing rays. The fragrance of earth rose sweet and heavy in the air. The prisoners could not see the blades of grass pushing up, the leaves of

the trees growing and the flowers blossoming ; but in the breath of the fresh, rustling air, they breathed in the savour of spring.

Fritz sat over his work, drawing fine reeds (which lay against the wall in thick bundles, cut to the regulation length of one yard) through the wooden frame of the seat of a chair. He had been given this work because he did it with great industry and decided taste. His hands flew over his work, swift and faultless ; soon, from under them, a pattern emerged, which he himself had thought out : it represented the stars and the sphere. But his knees trembled, his eyes went blind, his ears throbbed with the pulsing of his blood, as the sun shone down on his head. A tiny drop of perspiration ran down from his forehead on to the lashes of his right eye and hung there like a tear ; through his blurred gaze, extended far before him, he could see water, in all its silver splendour, motionless, shining like polished metal. He threw his head back ; he closed his eyes ; the water vanished, yet his mouth hung open, and, from between his trembling lips, came a ripple of low, voiceless, hissing laughter. The work fell from his hands to the floor with a clatter. Fritz sprang up from his seat, moved about with swift, soft steps, his knees trembling beneath him, the laughter rising continually from his gaping mouth. He threw his hands up, opened and closed them convulsively, clutched at space ; then, of a sudden, he picked up a bundle of reeds, swung it high over his head and loaded it on his bowed back as though it were some heavy burden. He paced up and down, yet the weight of the reeds was too light ; they did not bear down harshly upon him, whipping him as he walked, but, rather, danced crackling up and down at each step he took and only rubbed gently and evenly over his neck and legs. He packed the bundle tighter, pressed it between his hands, stooped low and lifted it very high over his neck, bringing it down with a sound thwack against his neck. Again and again he beat himself, yet, strive as he would, he could not recapture that sensation of rage that carried him beyond

consciousness ; the reeds swung back, elastic and light. Worn out, he threw them to the floor.

He stood still, panting, a dark flush on his face, his hands clenched and unclenched spasmodically. A rage of desire and a cold fury filled him. His eyes, grown wide and dark, shone like lacquer as he stared up at the little window and the background of golden sunlight. Suddenly a bird flew by, fluttering in a sharp curve with tremulous pinions, and trilling ; it paused for a second to glide on the air, then winged its way back again high in the heavens. At that moment, for the first time, Fritz distinctly recollected little Anna. In the golden light of the window, in the joyful whirr of the bird's flight and the piercing call of its trill Fritz found memories of her little lithe figure, her dancing step, her hair that rustled like feathers, the laughter of her open, rosy, singing mouth. She appeared not as the murderer's victim, dead, piteous and imploring vengeance, but as a picture of high allure, as the expression of all desire. He stretched out his arms, bowed down before the vision ; but his arms circled space only, and he fell to the floor. Now he was rolling about on the ground, tangling his hands amid the smooth yet sharp reeds ; he knotted them about his wrists, drawing the knot fast with his teeth, until the blood ran from the deep cuts. It trickled slow and thick over his hands and he stared . . .

This frightened him and brought him to his senses. With his hands still bound, he gazed at the wild disorder in the narrow cell : the reeds lying tumbled on the floor, the frame upset, his stool tossed in a corner. Perplexed, he watched his blood gushing over his hands. He was afraid it would trickle on to the floor and stain his reeds ; he feared, too, to wipe them on his smock or redden the water by washing them. Yet everything must be in order ; things must be set right. He therefore waved his hands in the air, then rubbed them together, so that the blood might entirely cover them ; then he licked the points of his fingers with his tongue, angry, sorrowful as he tasted his own blood. Quietly, carefully, he unfastened his clothes, took off his

shirt, with the tips of his fingers, and wiped off his hands on his naked belly. He closed his eyes again, turned his head aside, but could not help feeling the contact with himself. It was like a violent blow. He was conscious now of the sight of his belly, of what he had concealed so carefully from look or thought but what his mother had uncovered. Fiercely, then, he smote himself with his fists as though seeking to slash himself, to kill himself as she had conjured him. A dampness of blood, sweat, and lust wet his body ; tears fell in streams over his face.

For a long time, he stood in the light March sunshine, dizzy with pain. He raised his tear-stained face towards the little window where the bird's flight had reminded him of Anna and brought him the vision of her. A hushed sobbing shook his body. He knew that to her, too, he had done the fearful thing he had just done to himself. He knew that he yearned for murder and that he was lost . . . lost. . . .

A fleecy white cloud, blown along the heavens by the spring breeze, cast a shadow over the sun. Still naked, with slow, weary movements, Fritz gathered the reeds from the floor, bundled them up again and set them in one corner, then picked up his frame and backed the stool into place. He caught sight of his hands ; they were still covered with blood and filth. Then, all sense of shame or modesty abandoning him, he washed his hands as best he could. A remnant of his old feeling that all must be set aright rose in him : he dried his hands on his shirt and arranged his clothes. He took up his work again, but held it idle as he saw the network of scars on his hands. From that day on, he felt a deep sorrow. He worked but little and ceased singing entirely. . .

All night, he dreamed of murder. His horrible knowledge so oppressed him that he himself dared not look too closely into these dreams. But he felt he was committing murder ; he felt his lustful blood roused, his limbs grown light and carried forward by a strange force ; in his hands he held a soft, delicate body, tender and warm to his palms. His

heart beat wildly within him ; he pressed, he choked the heart he felt beating against him, the whole world was dead for him, nothing moved, earth bore him no longer. Now it opened up under him ; the morass gurgled under his feet ; he sank into it, became one with the heavy, black waves of mire.

In the morning, he awoke with difficulty, his face pale and drawn, his eyes muddy. The jailer, noticing his despondency, communicated with the Chaplain ; the latter began at last to hope that the conscience of the prisoner was awakening. But he found him strangely stubborn and quite beyond the reach of his counsel. Not only did he ignore any allusion to his deed, but no longer sang and prayed. He sought to do so, for his resistance in this respect did not come from obstinacy ; but he could utter no sound. His glance fell obliquely to the floor ; his hands and feet moved in a continual, quiet motion.

" Why don't you fold your hands ? " the Chaplain whispered, breaking off in the middle of a prayer.

Fritz stared down at them and was silent.

" Don't you wish to pray to God any longer ? "

Fritz nodded. Suddenly he flushed ; a deep crimson stain appeared on his brow.

" Can't you pray ? " the Chaplain asked.

Fritz shrugged his shoulders.

" Well, I shall pray for you ; you listen."

He read softly, almost as though he were speaking to himself ; it was a simple prayer, a plea for the redemption of the repentant sinner. As he looked up, he added of his own accord :

" O Lord my God, do Thou have mercy upon his sin, do Thou have mercy upon his lost soul. Amen."

He noticed that Fritz wept ; his hands were not folded but their convulsive movement was quieted and he had ceased to stamp with his feet. The Chaplain moved across to him, laid his hand on the fair head of the murderer and said :

" God is with you. He will show you mercy. I know it."

And, himself deeply moved, he left the cell.

On the morrow, they told Fritz his application for a revision of sentence was soon to come up ; he would therefore be removed from this prison. He shrank visibly ; his lips went white.

" Oh well, don't worry about it," the jailer said, " You asked for it ; it will pass all right."

Fritz said nothing, as he took up his work again. But at noon, the jailer found him sitting idle, his hands dug deep into the sharp bundle of reeds. He noticed that the fleshy parts of Fritz's hands were cut.

" What are you doing ? " he asked. " Now you've gone and cut yourself again. I suppose you want to go to the Infirmary, eh ? But a pair of wounds like that isn't good enough. No, it won't do. Besides, you're no better off in the Infirmary than you are here. Since when have you been so clumsy ? "

The jailer jested with him in friendly fashion and brought him water to wash his hands. In spite of his wounds, his work was finished in the evening, the reeds woven in a fine pattern. At night, it rained, softly but a great deal. On the following morning, the jailer found Fritz lying unconscious by his bed, his hands hidden over a wound, deep in his body : a mangled mass of blood, flesh and reeds. They quickly transferred him to the Infirmary, where, after a rapid examination, he was given an anæsthetic and his mutilated body was bound up.

While this was being done, his appeal came up before the Court ; it was rejected and the sentence reaffirmed. The father sat close to the counsel for the defence ; when the verdict was announced, he left the room, laughing boisterously. The next day he appeared at the prison, asking to see his son. At the Infirmary, he asked the Medical Officer about the lad's ailment.

" A self-inflicted wound," the doctor said quietly, " It often happens here."

The father stamped over to his son's bedside. Fritz sat up in bed ; there was a board over his knees, and, on

it, he was folding square papers into bags. Very soon after coming to, he had begged for work to do. As his father appeared, Fritz did not look up, but continued to work. For a long spell, the father, too, was silent.

" They did you in all right," the father said. Then, menacing : " Did you confess ? "

" Did you make a fool of yourself ? " the father stormed.

" I can't help it," Fritz answered in a low, soft voice. " I wanted to kill it."

Now, for the first time, the father seemed to understand. Suddenly he broke into loud peals of furious, scornful laughter ; his red beard covered his white pale face, his little, shifty eyes were lost, the veins bulged out on his swollen neck. He roared out :

" You ox ! Yes, it's an ox you are ; there's nothing of the bull in you, no, not that ! " He flicked his fingers. " Oh, you ox ! "

Laughing, he raised his heavy red hand, suddenly clenched his fist, and, with a hiss of hatred, struck his son full in the face. Fritz cowered, gave a scream, then fell to whimpering. The orderly dragged the father from the bed before he could administer a second blow, though he spat across the room at his son's bleeding face. Then he strode out of the room, snorting.

At the end of ten days, Fritz was taken back to his cell and began his fifteen years' sentence. No one ever paid him a visit or wrote him a letter during this time, save that every New Year, a regulation package of presents came from Christian Scheffel. But there was never a word of greeting enclosed.

About a month after his illness, Fritz's body, which had remained youthful for so long, began to grow. His light eyes swam in a warm, rather placid glance ; his cheeks and chin filled out, round and rosy ; his skin took on a porcelain-like colouring ; his white neck filled out like a woman's ; his hands, too, grew plump, ironing out the scars. He was a modest and quiet prisoner ; he worked hard and kept his cell in order. Often, he sang, in a gentler, prettier tone,

and never too loud ; the jailer never had cause to rebuke him. Now he lived blithely among his fellows, and, having been taken out of solitary confinement because of his good behaviour, slept among them as peacefully as they too slept. Only very seldom, and at the turn of the season, he would grind his teeth behind clenched jaws, and, if awakened, he would kick at the jailer. When the latter retreated, he would vent his wrath on the furniture. On the morrow, he would be plunged in melancholy, refusing to eat or work. But his passion was soon spent.

Because of his otherwise good conduct, he was put to work with the " trusties." He went regularly to Common Prayers ; he never prayed alone again. The jailers, the Warden and the Inspectors of Prisons all were pleased to speak to him, and, in every manner, sought to bring him to confess. To be sure, he never repeated his earlier defiant statement : " I have done nothing," but he would be silent, lost in a dream, gazing into space, with a deep melancholy on his pure, smooth face. And, in the end, everyone, even those who had most scrupulously investigated and judged his crime, still could not know for certain. The world also was obliged to abandon hope of a certain solution to the riddle of what happened to Anna Scheffel between the time she disappeared and the recovery of her corpse.

CHAPTER IX

In the thirteenth year of Fritz Schütt's imprisonment, his former master, Christian Scheffel, appeared at the Warden's Office to inquire whether he was still alive and in good health and how he had behaved in prison. The officials listened to him in astonishment and asked him whether he wished to visit Fritz. Christian Scheffel, who had not raised his eyes during the conversation, now bowed his white head, meditated a while, finally shook it in negation and contented himself with asking that when the prisoner was released, he might be sent with his papers to Nieder-Schaumburg to Christian's house. He laid down twenty-five marks on the table to defray the cost of the journey.

The Warden himself had been present at the interview ; when Christian rose to go, he offered him his hand, deeply moved. Christian took it awkwardly ; and, for the first time, looked up. His glance held infinite power and infinite mystery ; it was devoid of all human expression, yet penetrated with all human experience, mad yet lucid, clairvoyant yet blind. The Warden had waited with intense curiosity to see that glance ; now, confused, abashed, he turned aside. When he looked again, the heavy wrinkled lids had once more fallen over the deep eyes under the protecting ridge of the high, prominent brow which still shone with the strange luminousness of old. Christian was now fifty-seven years old ; his great height was unimpaired by work and age ; but the sag of his narrow shoulders and his thin neck, overgrown with white hair, told of the destruction of his inner force, and his snowy head and beard bore witness to his silent grief.

The Warden was fat and short, with a ruddy, smooth young face.

" It is a great and Christian action, sir," he said, " to take that lost soul back again after what you have endured at his hands. You belong to the true disciples of Christ ; in the name of all humane, civilised men, I want to thank you for your noble decision."

He paused for a moment. Christian Scheffel only shrugged his shoulders gently.

" I must tell you," the Warden went on, " that all of us, who are sincerely interested in our prisoners, wish that no man who comes here should ever leave. For, when all's said and done, he'll never find another place in the world. There is not the slightest doubt but that prison offers the criminal a chance to improve, for here he is forced to control his impulses and, through discipline and punishment, to come to his senses. There are very few men indeed whom fate has used so harshly that they have not a seed of good in them. I believe that the fundamental purpose of prison is simply to give them the opportunity to cultivate that seed, to train it to bear fruit. I base my faith in the necessity of imprisonment for criminals entirely upon the fact that here they are held prisoner from themselves and their dreadful deeds. Take the case of men who do learn in this way to improve, who by strenuous and loyal effort develop the good in them enough to overcome the bad : what happens to them when they go out into the world again ? Here, they have been protected constantly, they have been brought back to themselves whenever they began to relapse. Yes, they have been recognised as criminals, that is true ; but they have not been treated as such save that their evil side is taken for granted and ignored, their good side appealed to. But in the outside world they move between contempt, fear, suspicion and mistrust on the one hand and fresh temptations, loneliness and poverty on the other ; and their bad instincts are equally called forth by both. A time must come when human society will make this problem its serious concern and find some solution for it ; in the meantime, we can do nothing whatever to alter the existing state of things. That is why I so deeply

appreciate your truly magnificent attitude. I look upon my prisoners as my children ; I look beyond their crimes ; I concentrate my attention on their behaviour and development in prison. Fritz Schütt is a thoroughly good and well-behaved prisoner ; according to the records before my time and during the six years I have been in charge, he has given no cause for complaint. On the contrary, he has earned nothing but praise. It is true he could never be brought to confess his deed, but he seems to have put his own soul in order . . . and certainly there was something very wrong there. But his remarkable illness during his first year here, which I am not at liberty to discuss with you in detail, confirms me in my opinion of him. It also moves me to assure you that your plan for him is not only profoundly generous and Christian, but also altogether safe."

The Warden offered his hand to Christian again, but he seemed not to notice it ; he bowed his head twice, once in agreement and once in greeting. Then he left the prison.

He reached home before nightfall. It was not to Treuen he returned, not to the home of his happiness and its destruction, but to the home of his old age, of a life lived in the shadow of the past. Three people shared this past with its rich, splendid memories that survived so mysteriously in the mind : Christian Scheffel, his sister Klara, now sixty-seven years old, and Emma the maid, the youngest of the three, aged fifty-one. The new home was a small, simple farm, not far from Treuen yet in another world. It belonged to the village of Nieder-Schaumburg, but lay half an hour away from the last house of the village.

Half of Christian's fields, which were long and narrow, adjoined the highroad. The house had two stories ; it was built of fresh yellow brick, with a tile roof and shining windows that could be seen far off, set in white-painted frames. It lay at the foot of a pretty meadow whose slopes fell evenly on all sides, forming the only break in the vast, monotonous level of the fields and pastures around. The

little hill was planted to the top with regular rows of fruit-trees ; then, at the top, it flattened out into a tiny meadow dominating the large ones. Here a summer-house stood under a magnificent lime, a landmark, visible for many miles around. In summer, the two women came to sit here during the day, working at their light domestic tasks or to rest in the evening, their hands folded in their laps, their eyes, weary and dim, looking out over the wide darkening landscape. Goats and lambs grazed and sported on the hillside, ran down into the meadows on the far side. But they did not stay there much, for the strip of pasture, though long, was very narrow and afforded little space for their gambols. This paddock was bounded by a clear, swift-running brook, whose bank, so far as it belonged to the farm, had been made solid with wooden planks where the women did their washing. The two free sides of the hill led down to the wide rectangle of the fields, planted for the most part with wheat and oats, save for the large potato patch. Towards the highroad was a grey-gravel yard, with the well in the centre, as at Treuen, and a fine, wide trough. On the right-hand side of the house, with the narrower wall against the hill, stood the wide oblong stables, with a granary in the roof ; farther along down the field was a second, large barn with a threshing-floor of solid masonry, and sliding doors. There were but an ox, two cows and a pair of bays in the shed. More numerous was the small stock, particularly sheep, goats and poultry. The earnings of the farm came out of its produce ; they sold grain, milk, butter, eggs and wool, but there was no more slaughtering of cattle. Even at the farm itself, the master had put a ban upon slaughter ; nothing was killed there except now and then a chicken. Such meat as they required for holidays and occasional other meals, they bought at the market, on the days when they took their own produce in to sell. Otherwise the meals at the farm were plentiful and nourishing. The servant staff consisted of two young male hands and a maid who, though she had but one eye, was uncommonly strong and capable.

The house was rectangular ; it was arranged as Treuen had been. On the ground floor, a broad hallway bisected the house from front to back ; to the right, opening out on the yard, was a spacious kitchen with stove, tables and benches like the kitchen at Treuen. Here master and hands ate together. On the opposite side was the master's room.

This was furnished with a simple bed, a washstand, a desk before the window, and, beside it, towards the inside of the room, the shelves with his old school books, Karl's and Gustav's, and the Bible. There was no table; the clothes hung in a corner of the wall behind a curtain. Three chairs stood in a row against the wall next to the door, with two guns and the large old-fashioned pistol hanging on the wall above them. There were no pictures and no mirror. Despite the care with which the white pleated curtains were disposed at the windows, the much polished lamp with its pink silk shade on the bookcase, and the clock with its bright wide-swinging pendulum, the room looked like an uninhabited cell. In effect, its owner never entered it except at night to throw himself, weary and desolate, on the narrow bed, and left it early the next morning for the entire day. Only on Sundays, he sat there for an hour or two in the afternoon at the open desk, to balance his accounts and write letters.

Klara and Emma looked after the room with tender, furtive solicitude, keeping the fine curtains immaculate, burnishing the lamp, and regulating the clock. Now and then, one or the other would silently lay a special cake or the first fruits of the season on the window-sill ; in winter they always left a store of fragrant apples there, which Christian silently accepted. Besides the low-voiced conversation of the two women as they worked, scarcely a word was ever heard within the walls of that room. Scarcely a sigh ever escaped Christian's oppressed heart ; he had become almost totally silent. From time to time, as he sat writing at his desk, his painful gaze would turn towards the bookcase where the Bible stood. But he never took it down and he never went to church again. For why should

he hear the word of God in his ears when he bore the words of His will ineradicably branded upon his soul, cleansed at last in the purifying flame of sorrow? He still believed. He had no fear and no hope; he neither loved nor hated; but he believed in God, although an outcast from His mercy, His grace, even His justice. And he believed, too, in death, the dark gate which, when it opened, would reveal to him, in its glory and light, the countenance of the Lord.

He had freed himself from every memory; he had rejected consolation. His two sons had grown into fine handsome men who might well have been the joy of any father; but he had sent them from him. When the elder was twenty-three and the younger twenty-one, he had taken them himself to the ship which was to bear them to the hard, free life of a Californian ranch he had chosen for them. He had gone to much pains to find them this situation; the children wrote regularly and seemed happy and contented. They sometimes spoke of home-sickness during the first year, especially on the days of festivals at home. But gradually, the words of the foreign language wove themselves into their simple speech, until at last their mother-tongue came awkwardly to their pens. They had grown up identical in character and manner; they were devoted and inseparable.

Until Gustav's marriage, Christian had gone on working for them and making his earnings meet their needs. He had amassed a certain fortune for them, part of which they had already received and used for a ranch of their own which they built together. Now that they needed him no longer, Christian reduced his stock to the indispensable few which now stood in his stable and gave up some of his ploughland as well. In the last two years, he had arranged to produce only as much as he needed for existence, emergencies and old age for himself, for those he had gathered about him, and for his sons when he was gone.

Many years ago at Treuen, Christian had at last obtained the body of his dead child from the police and buried her

in a little grave next to her mother's. The carpenter had made her small coffin with the same love and skill he had expended in making chests for Gustav and Karl when they first set off to school. The whole neighbourhood had been waiting for this funeral, but it took place secretly. The father himself carried the little coffin, knelt down at the open grave and laid it deep in the ground. Damp clods of earth broke off the walls against his white head. He was alone with the pastor, who was so moved that he could barely speak the words of dedication :

> " *I bless these, thy poor mortal remains, which have fallen into dust according to the will of the Lord. May thy sinless soul hover about us and bring consolation and peace, in the name of Almighty God, to those who mourn thee in profoundest grief.*"

The little mound was quickly raised and Christian set at its head a plain wooden cross, such as he had raised to the memory of that other child, so like his own, that he had buried in a foreign land. He returned home, lonely and silent.

After that, his life was spent in toil and struggle. Bad crops and sickness among the cattle had reduced his income ; he owed his rent and many unpaid debts. He had to sell horses and wagons, to squander his handsome breeding stock for slaughter in order to cover these and his taxes. He felled all the timber which the terms of his lease allowed him, and had it made into furniture and other objects for sale. Then came a good hay crop which he was able to sell, for his herds were all gone, and the three crops following were of fair yield, which enabled him to liquidate the last of his debts with five thousand marks to the good.

His lease expired at the end of this period ; he did not renew it. He left Treuen as he had come, neither richer nor poorer, alone, without wife or child, although he had laboured and harvested, loved and begotten.

During this time the life of his sister Klara had found fulfilment. One autumn night during his last year at Treuen,

Christian received a message summoning him to the Baron's deathbed. He had found his brother-in-law unconscious in the throes of death, his face and hands blue. For nine hours his strong body fought the vain struggle before its great power was at last overcome. Klara sat by the dying man, without words or tears, and without movement, save once when she laid her right hand over her husband's eyes because they seemed about to open again. She had been a widow for many years now ; long ago, her husband in his lifetime had been buried in her heart. She refused to allow his relatives to come. When it was all over and the last desperate breath had ceased to stir his breast, she signed to her brother to follow her as she left the room. Together they made the preparations for the funeral and informed the family of his death. Klara had worn mourning ever since Martha had died. She had long known—even before the little corpse was found at Treuen—that she was guilty of her share of wrong-doing. She had killed her husband within herself years before he died ; she had reckoned on his sickness and wished for him to die. She loved her brother, she grieved over the ill-starred child. The Baron had paid no heed to her, they had never talked together ; yet he understood her ; he knew her mortal secret contempt for him, he knew that she never withdrew from his embrace without disillusion and shame, he knew something in her heart had been destroyed because her mother-love could never find fulfilment. The malevolence of his will showed how he had suffered at her hands. He had made it a year before his death, bequeathing everything to his future children, adding that should God see fit to deny him, and his wife Klara, this blessing, his younger cousin's children should be his heirs and inherit all he possessed except Klara's dowry, plus a retro-active interest of ten per cent. and the entire contents of the house, which were to revert to her. In return for this, he requested her to burn all tokens of himself, including his wedding clothes. The singular provisions of this will shocked the heirs who did not understand its implications ; the Court encouraged the widow

to contest it. But Klara declared herself in complete agreement with it and refused both the proposal of the heirs to make her an allowance and the excessive interest on her small dowry. She left Graulitz with only her personal possessions and joined her brother at Treuen. She too left her home neither richer nor poorer than she had come, and alone. The work, strength and hope of her youth had been wasted.

Christian's savings and the sister's dowry were of the same value ; together they bought the little farm which was to be their third and last home on earth. They took Emma, their good and faithful servant. She was still a tragic figure, wearing on her face the marks of her shame and grief over the son she had brought into the world. Her scars faded with the years ; now they made pale furrows over her skin which had grown brown and withered with age. Suffering had killed the gentle expression in her eyes ; but nothing could impair the goodness of her heart. She continued to love what life had left her : Karl and Gustav, far away over the seas ; Christian, her master, who, having saved her life, bound her more closely to it every day by her knowledge of his need of her, and Klara, her first mistress and her last. Her spirit revived in her new home ; she even ventured to revisit the graves where her dead mistress and the child lay, a pilgrimage which, so long as she lived in Treuen, she had not dared to make.

In her pleasant room over the kitchen, she prayed for her son every night. This room was her refuge when despair and memories overwhelmed her. She would shut herself in and implore God with passionate entreaty to take her child's life ; wringing her hands, she would whisper over and over again :

" Dear God, take him away, take his evil life from this earth."

Sometimes she would mingle this terrible prayer with the words of the Lord's Prayer :

" Take Fritz away from this earth and deliver him from evil, for Thine is the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory . . ."

Thus she hoped continually that the murderer might fall ill in prison and die ; she waited year in and year out for this news. For in death she could love him again as she could love him only in memory, when she forgot the later years and thought of him only as a child, gentle, diligent, humble, joy and purity beaming from his lovely face into her own, effacing the shame of his begetting. With her kerchief tied far over her scarred face, she took turns with the one-eyed maid in accompanying Klara to church.

Klara was the only one of them who could think back on the past and lose herself in memory with purely personal pain. In her room over her brother's, furnished with the most highly treasured of her old possessions, on her sewing-table, near the window, stood the picture of the child in her birthday frock, with her fluffy curls framing her face, her great serious eyes and smiling mouth, her little right hand raised in a gesture of warning. Klara looked at it every day, hung the frame with garlands of flowers or sprays of pine which she brought back from the churchyard, for there was no forest in their neighbourhood, now. Though Klara was the oldest of the three, in many ways she seemed the youngest. Her rich wheat-yellow hair had blanched but slightly at the temples ; her stern features had grown milder ; the tears of anguish she had shed had lent her somewhat hard eyes a sad and gentle light ; the bitter lines about her mouth had relaxed. Thus, late in her life, she had found refuge in the happiness of sharing the life and sorrows of the brother she loved and lavishing upon him the riches of her own heart, which had lacked an object for so long.

They were growing old, but they still had to work hard. Christian toiled in the fields like any of his hired men ; Klara looked after the meals ; Emma watched over house and stables. The young maid helped them both ; twice a week she took the produce in a basket on her back to sell at market. They worked hand in hand, living for each other and constantly communicating without the need of words. They never spoke of the past, not even at evening

when they sat side by side in the summer-house on the hilltop, resting. At meals, when the young servants jested and teased one another, their talk was only of the weather or their work.

One day news came to Christian from America that a granddaughter had been born to him and christened Anna. He sat in his bare room at his open desk and locked the letter up in a drawer. He felt no joy. Suddenly he understood why darkness had frightened him in his youth, when joy, passion and happiness had stirred in him. It was his warning, but he had not understood it. Now, for the first time, he learned that every human existence, once awakened, can be rooted in good as well as evil. Clearly, dispassionately, he remembered that thirteen years had passed since they had found his child dead. He thought of the murderer in prison, a child too, like his own, who had grown up under his own roof to so fearful an end. Might he himself not have been the father of the murderer rather than of the innocent victim? It had not lain with him to decide; one was no less fearful than the other. It was in that hour that the irresistible impulse drove him to journey to the prison and ask that the prisoner be sent to him on his release. He told them nothing of this decision at home, and a year went by, swift and still as all the years were now.

Then, one day shortly before Christmas, another letter came for the master, an important-looking letter with great seals and stamps. It was from the Office of the Prison; it informed Christian that in view of exemplary behaviour, the last year of Fritz Schütt's sentence was to be remitted. The Warden asked whether Christian's magnanimous offer still held good in spite of the change of date, and whether Christian was still prepared to receive the prisoner.

As Christian's room was never heated, he sat in the kitchen that evening to write his answer, with the others grouped unsuspecting about him. He asked to have Fritz Schütt sent to him as arranged and to be told the exact date of his release. When he had finished his letter, he looked

up and noticed that the two women had maintained a considerate silence all the time he had been writing. He looked from one to the other, then suddenly smiled. Without speaking they smiled back at him, all three astonished at the causeless gaiety which had risen in them unbidden, as if by magic, out of their dead souls, to shine in their ageing, sorrowful faces. Christian rose, pulled on his high leather boots, and took the letter himself to the village. It was snowing hard ; the earth shone like crystal under the lightless pall of the sky. Night had once been full of profoundest meaning in Christian's life, but now he strode on his way, dead to this too.

Christmas came and they celebrated the holiday for sake of the younger servants, since Christian insisted that everyone should have his due, that the young and live folk should have their work and food, their wages and pleasures. Klara had set up and trimmed a Christmas-tree, bought presents and lit the candles, read the Christmas service aloud and sung the carol. She herself was moved by the gracious ceremony. She trimmed Anna's picture too, and lit a pink candle for her, decorated it with golden paper stars ; over it, Klara wept alone for the dead child she had loved so dearly. But she never dared mention her, not even on this Christmas night. In the flickering light of the candles on the trees, her brother stood as if carved in stone, and Emma sat in a corner by the stove, her hands pressed over her face. Christian did not stir out of his petrified rigidity until just as the two women were about to leave the house with their lighted lanterns, on their way to the evening service, which nobody ever missed. Then he drew his sister gently to him and laid his cheek in deepest love against hers. He took Emma's hand in both of his and pressed it.

The next morning, a mild still winter day, when the three servants had gone to church, Emma and Klara were sitting in the kitchen together as usual, leisurely preparing the dinner. Suddenly they interrupted their whispered talk in astonishment as Christian came across the yard, obviously making towards them, though at that hour he

never entered the kitchen. He came in and sat down, watching them at their work for a moment ; he was smiling as he had smiled that evening when he had written the letter. But only Klara saw this, for Emma was kneeling before the stove to light it.

" Yes," Christian said, " you work hard, both of you. The best thing for us, after all, is to look after others, isn't it ? Come here, Emma, we three have something to talk about."

He drew his old maidservant down beside him on the bench and took her hand in his. Klara sat facing them.

" Has it occurred to you, Emma," the master asked, " that Fritz's time will soon be up now and that he will be let out ? "

The two women were staring at him, Klara turned pale with horror ; the scars on Emma's face grew livid as the blood rushed to her face. She tried to escape and hide but she could not wrench her hand free from the master's fast grip. He spoke louder now, slowly and emphatically :

" When they set him free, he must be taken care of. He belongs to us. He is ours, just like the misfortune which came on all of us. It is my wish that he come back here and work here, just as before."

" God help us ! " Klara breathed softly, appalled.

But Emma, distracted, shrieked :

" No, no, master, no, no ! Not that ! Oh, dear Lord, why didn't he die ? Why didn't he die ? " And she writhed in agony, her hand still fast in Christian's grasp. " I can't see him, I can't see him ever again ! Oh God, if only he was dead ! "

" It is terrible to wish such a thing, Christian," Klara said in a low voice, spellbound by her brother's stony, downcast gaze.

" What was fearful is past ; this is not fearful any more," he replied calmly. " He is your child, Emma, and I helped to bring him up. We are lonely old people here, he can live with us again. I shall keep my eyes on him ; he will live a good life."

" If only he was dead ! If only he was dead ! " the mother moaned.

" Christian, he is a murderer," said the sister.

" That is God's affair."

" But your child," Klara implored, " your child."

" I have grieved over her deeply," answered the brother.

For a long time, all were silent. At last Klara spoke :

" I am getting on for seventy," she said, " I never thought to experience this. Do as you think best, Christian."

But Emma was beyond tears, beyond words. She collapsed into her place, scarcely noticing that the master had released her hand. Then she got up and went about her work. Klara's sad eyes first sought towards the quiet snow-covered yard beyond the window, then turned towards her brother who sat staring down on the table, on which his hand rested lightly. She bent her head and kissed it, abandoning her heart gladly to his will.

Only Emma suffered ; only his mother shuddered at the thought of seeing Fritz again. In her despair, she still clung to the hope that in the eleventh hour her prayer might be fulfilled and her child die on the eve of release, or that she might mercifully fall dead when he entered the house and she was forced to look upon the man who was her child no longer. So she went in fear, daily expecting the awful moment, gazing with terror at the determined countenance of a master whom she could not understand. But when month after month went by and nothing happened, she sank gradually into the calm of exhaustion.

At Easter, the younger of the farm-boys left because his time was up ; nobody came to take his place. Christian said there was nobody good available at that time. Each took a part of his work upon them, but it was almost more than they could manage.

" I shall have to get someone by harvest-time," Christian said one day, as they all sat round the table, weary after the day's toil, " perhaps even sooner. I'd like the bed made ready in case."

During the days that followed, often they saw him in

the vast hay-loft above the stables, busy at something he did not explain. He went into the village and came back with planks ; then they heard him hammering. But he said nothing and they asked nothing. Then, one day, Emma climbed into the loft in pursuit of a strayed chicken and saw what he had done. Half the width of the floor had been cleared and the hay piled up beyond it, out of the way, and securely roped. In the cleared space, under a skylight, a little room had been constructed out of white planed boards and furnished with the former hand's bed, table and chair. The window had been pushed back and the May sunshine was pouring in ; the room was touchingly simple and bright and full of peace and tranquillity. Emma stood gazing at it for a long time puzzling how and to what end this room had come into being. Then she understood. This was the master's work ; with his own hands, he had made it, and to it he had brought the furniture in secret for a stranger. And the peace which lay upon this little room, modest yet made with his own hands by a master for his servant, and so carefully, tenderly, stole into her heart. Tears ran down her scarred face on to her breast ; she folded her hands and said to herself : " His will be done ! " And so the day came when Fritz returned to stay.

It was early in July, a little before the reaping. On Saturday afternoon, the master had gone down the highroad towards the village in spite of a threatening storm ; it was dark when he returned in the midst of a heavy, refreshing downpour. The household was all asleep ; early the next morning Klara and Emma had gone to church, returning only at dinner-time.

Klara went into the parlour first, laid down her shawl and hymn-book, then went slowly out towards the hillock, with its flowering meadow bright with gold and green in the sunshine after rain. She saw her brother in the little summer-house and started up the gentle slope to join him.

Christian smiled down at her as she approached ; he was pleased as he noticed that her gait had become more

supple and her figure less gaunt, that her face, so like his own, now in her old age wore a wistful, charming air of youth. She sat down beside him and in a few, slow words told how twins had been christened in church that morning and a new tax announced. Emma, who had stayed behind to put the last touches on the dinner and to lay the table, now came up the hillside to call them, pausing every now and then to pluck a spray of sage to flavour the salad. As she reached the entrance to the summer-house the frightened bleating of a lamb and a splashing of water broke the stillness. All three turned to look in the direction of the cry ; on the bank of the silvery stream they saw a man, kneeling. In his arms, he held a lamb which had evidently been skipping over the planks along the bank, and, losing its footing, had fallen into the water. The man must have pulled it out, for he was rubbing the frightened animal and brushing the water out of its wool. He wore a pair of trousers and a white shirt, but no shoes ; he had a cap on his head. Spread on the grass, on either side of him, were a coat and a pair of high boots. His unusually broad, massive back was turned to the three in the summer-house. Klara shaded her eyes with her hand to see him more clearly.

" Who is that ? " she asked.

" It is Martin, the new man for the harvest," Christian replied calmly. " He came in the storm yesterday. That is why he has laid his coat and boots out there to dry. He has just cleaned them ; they're all the clothes he has. He need not do any work to-day but just look after his things. Send his dinner to him out there."

They went down to the house ; Emma sent the one-eyed maid out to the meadow with the new hand's dinner. She came back laughing.

" Why is Martin's head so bald and him so young ? " she asked.

Then Klara knew who it was. But Emma suspected nothing. In the evening, it was Klara who prepared the supper with the maid's help and Emma who rested in the

summer-house. Her tireless hands moving at her changeless task, she knitted woollen socks for the master ; her gentle eyes, shaded as usual by the kerchief she wore to hide her disfigurements, looked out over the darkening plain. The day had been hot ; lately they had all felt their work was becoming somewhat hard for their failing strength. The light was fading out of the sky, the brook murmured drowsily, the evening air was redolent of limes. Emma fell asleep. She did not hear the master call her name and he would not allow any one to wake her. A moment after, she woke up with a start and ran down the slope through the twilight. Her eyes were still heavy with sleep, but she recognised the new man coming out of the house. She saw him from the side, his powerful thick-set figure and plump face, his chin hidden under a thick curly beard. He passed on, hurrying shyly towards the stables, and disappeared in the doorway towards the stair leading to the little room she had accidentally discovered.

" That was Martin," she said to herself. " So the room was for him ? "

Supper had already been cleared away, but her place was waiting for her, set with milk, bacon, bread and a piece of cake.

" Since when have you taken to sleeping in the daytime, Emma ? " Klara asked smiling. " And you, the youngest of us all ! "

But Emma did not smile as she asked :

" Why is that new man Martin to sleep over the stable ? "

" I'd rather he did," Christian answered. " Then he can keep an eye on the cattle. We had a lot of martens there last winter."

Emma said nothing. But a vague disappointment stirred through her heart, so faintly that she herself was not aware of it. Very early next morning, she was alone in the kitchen before the others were up. The doors and windows were open wide, the light of the new day flooded the room. Suddenly a massive figure stood on the threshold bathed in the radiance of the young sun, and Emma saw the new

man before her, tall, broad, with heavy limbs, with round pink and white cheeks and a blonde untrimmed curly beard. A cap covered his head and the nape of his neck. He did not step farther into the kitchen, but stood looking at her with wide blue eyes, clear as a child's. She looked back at him.

" You must be Martin," she said. She noticed his gaze following the tracery of scars on her face.

" Mother ! " he said suddenly in a soft voice. " Mother, good morning."

She recoiled in horror. " No," she stammered, raising her right hand as though to ward him off. " No, no, your name is Martin, what do you mean . . . ? "

" I'm Fritz. They let me out. But the master says I'm to be called Martin, because no one must know where I've come from."

That was all he said ; Emma made no answer. She had recognised his lovely voice ; but her eyes could not believe that this grown man was Fritz. Her heart was helplessly torn between a horror of him and a faint obscure joy which had begun to stir in the unplumbed depths of her being.

" I got on well there, mother," he began again. " I behaved myself and they were all pleased with me. Things are better with me now."

He smiled at her and his eyes were bright. Emma heard the maid coming downstairs.

" Come inside," she said dully. Then she turned to the stove, her back to him. As the maid entered, she said in her usual voice :

" Sit down, Martin, the porridge will be ready in a minute."

From that day on, the burly stranger sat with them at their meals, always meek, polite and self-possessed. The hardest work of the harvest was now upon them ; he showed himself extraordinarily capable and industrious, talking little and living entirely in himself. Yet he enjoyed working with the animals ; they seemed to hold a singular attraction for him which he strove to conceal. He attended

to the horses with extreme care ; he kept the stables in immaculate order.

It was not long before he had gathered all kinds of small creatures about him in his little room. He caught a mouse and tamed it ; at great pains, he brought up a pair of starlings which he had found newly hatched, lying on the ground under their nest, where some enemy had left them. He even built them a nest in one corner of his skylight window, where he would leave them all day long ; their parents, attracted by their familiar cry, would come to feed them. At night he kept them under his bed clothes in a corner of his bed. As they were hurt when he found them, he went out into the fields, searched along the banks of the streams, gathered cool, velvety grasses and dressed their wounds. They limped along ; their wings were lame ; but they throve in his sunny retreat. He spent his leisure training them with infinite patience, until at last they could whistle a few notes of a hymn. He took it into his head to accustom the house cat, a handsome but savage beast, to associate with his mouse and his birds. He succeeded so well that he found her on his bed one day with her entire litter, purring blissfully, while the little mouse ran to and fro over her, and the starlings sang, perched on the back of his lone chair. In winter, the mouse left him for warmer quarters in the hay-stack ; sometimes, as he climbed the stairs, he thought he could hear a thin squeaking, as though she were calling to him. He had long ago provided for the starlings, building them a spacious, airy house of thin twigs ; when the cold weather came and they began to hide their little heads under their wings, he put them carefully into the cage and carried them into the house.

After his first conversation with his mother, Fritz lay low for a long time. Once, it is true, he sought her out. This was when he brought her the first wages he earned, just as he had brought her his wages in childhood. Emma was alone in the kitchen. Fritz entered, held out his hand with the money :

" Here, mother."

But then, also, Emma drew back.

Even to herself, she called him Martin, seeking always to regard him as the new hand. But when, with the same terror, she recognised the old familiar qualities in Martin, a steadfastness such as Fritz had possessed ; a pair of eyes, wide and innocent, and a voice, a sweet mellow voice that filled the air, just as Fritz's voice in church had soared over the heads of the faithful—then she knew Martin *was* Fritz, her flesh, her blood, her heart, but lost in the tall body of a stranger. And when that stranger called her 'mother,' it was as though her dead were calling to her from within him as from a grave. She never named him son.

Fritz was a stranger to all of them. He seldom spoke to them ; he slept apart ; his leisure, he spent alone ; he did not remember the past and thought neither of evil, nor of good, nor of himself. Christian, Klara and Emma never recognised the old Fritz in him. But, for his part, Fritz knew them. They were still the same, though age and sorrow had set their mark upon them : his mother was his mother, for all the network of scars upon her face ; his master was his master, with the same noble figure and the same bright, shadowy eyes. Yet they rarely spoke to him, and, if they did, they called him by a name that was not his.

Often he longed to talk, but he dared not address even the maid or his fellow hand, for he must tell nothing about himself. At times, a great sadness came upon him ; he would seek relief in weeping and song. At night he wept, even in his dreams ; though no face or symbol haunted him, yet when he awoke, it was to find his face bathed in tears. To his animals, he talked an incomprehensible language, moving his lips in an indistinct murmur.

The third time Fritz spoke to his mother was when he brought the starlings to the house.

"May I leave the birds here in the kitchen, mother? It's cold up there in my room."

"Don't call me 'mother'!" Emma said. "Maybe it's sin for me to say so : but don't call me 'mother.' I wanted you

to die ; I prayed too fervently for you to die. Now I'm being punished for it and my punishment is that I have no feeling for my child. My boy isn't dead, he's alive ; and I ought to love him—I could love him too—but God made him die for me. Don't say ' mother ' to me, Martin."

She did not weep, but a harrowing grief was in her voice.

" But things are better with me now," Fritz said very gently as though to console her.

Emma made an effort to look at him ; her eyes scanned his bearded, rosy face. It was no longer like an angel's ; but it was not a devil's, either. This was not her child nor her child grown into a man ; yet somehow it was her child.

" God pity you ! " she said. " God pity you ! "

She took the birds from him and set them on a low cupboard in a window corner. From that day on, she began to look after him. On winter evenings, she would make shirts and knit socks for him : little by little, her heart warmed with love for this lonely stranger child who had come to her instead of her own child, whom she had lost.

The years went by, swift as days, one after the other, without any signal events to mark their passing. The three old people rested in life as they waited for the longer rest of death : the lonely prodigal lived on in the flower of a youth and strength that were hopelessly blighted.

Fritz's fellow hand left, an older man took his place. At last the one-eyed maid was the only youthful creature on the farm. She was a happy little thing in spite of her misfortune. On summer evenings, when her work was done, she would hasten to the village to meet other girls. They were a happy, gay company, always laughing and singing. She attended the village dances, too, and one winter evening she actually came home drunk. Emma found her, sleeping off her bout, on the floor outside the kitchen.

Four years after Martin's coming, a letter came announcing the return of Karl and Gustav for a visit. Christian received the news in silence ; there was no joy in his heart. But the women were delighted. They could speak of

nothing else as they bustled about. Long before the return of the children, they had prepared their reception. They opened the room upstairs, which had never been used ; they arranged the fine beds in which the children were born, years ago, at Treuen, in happier days. . . . The linen press was there too, filled with Martha's treasures, and the chest, empty now, where she had kept her wedding-dress and veil. Klara and Emma cleaned the house from top to bottom ; they baked bread and cakes, but far too soon, so the household had to eat them or let them go to waste. They could not conceive of a journey lasting so long ; they began to believe that the boys had never started or that the ship had sunk.

At last, in July, a telegram came announcing their arrival in two days' time and asking Christian to meet them at the nearest stage-station. Their hearts in their eyes, the women watched the trap being rolled out of the shed, cleaned, and harnessed. Martin handed the reins to the master, for Christian wished to go alone.

He left about noon and returned at dusk. As the trap turned aside, leaving the highroad and coming across country, Emma and Klara thrilled : they could make out two tall, slender men in dark suits, with city hats on their heads, and a woman sitting between them, with a child on her lap. The trap entered the yard and stopped at the well ; the passengers alighted. They all began talking at once loudly and with much laughter, as they handed bag after bag to Martin, who had suddenly appeared.

Christian slung the reins round the pump-handle and pushed a stone under the right front wheel. He paid no heed to his sons' chatter, but he bent down, took the child's little hand as she stood there, weary and puzzled amid her new surroundings ; he led her towards Emma and Klara who waited, tremulous in the doorway. Karl and Gustav followed them. Their dark eyes shone with happiness as they looked at this house and yard which were their homeland.

Christian raised the child in his arms and passed her to

Klara, who held her close, covering her with kisses. The child accepted the caresses calmly, without crying.

" What is your name ? " Klara asked when at last her emotion allowed her to speak. But the little girl did not understand the language of her father's people.

" What ? " she asked in a strong, low voice, bringing her tiny finger-tip over Klara's lips.

" Why, there's Aunt Klara ! " Karl cried. " Hello, Aunt Klara ! How are you, my dear ? Oh Lord, how we have all grown up ! "

He spoke in broken German. The two brothers laughed heartily together and shook Klara's hand, as she stood in embarrassment before them. They were ridiculously alike ; both had dark, close-clipped moustaches, dazzling white teeth, dark eyes and rich, black hair ; but Gustav was a hand's breadth taller than Karl. He was the more talkative, too, and his voice was a shade lighter.

Christian turned to Karl and said : " There is your nurse, Emma."

" Oh, hello, Emma ! " Gustav cried, going towards her. But Emma hung back, her hooded, scarred face sunk deep on her breast. Gustav took her hand and pressed it :

" How are you, Emma ? " he said. " You've changed a lot : I should never have known you again. I do hope you're well. I'm going to kiss you, just as I used to when I was a baby ! " Laughing, he took her face in both his hands and raised it to his lips. Then, suddenly, he saw her scars.

" Oh, Emma," he said, " poor old Emma ! Was it an accident ? "

He kissed her cheek gently, then caught his child and held her out to his old nurse.

" Here's my baby," he said, " isn't she sweet ? "

Emma stretched out her arms to take the child. But the latter, who had until then been so friendly, drew back at the sight of the scarred face and flung herself upon her mother. Emma covered her face with her hands ; she would have run into the house to hide, had Gustav let her go.

He said something in English to his wife, who went to Emma and kissed her.

Meanwhile the child was calmed and it was Karl's turn to express his affection for his old nurse. Fervently he embraced her, pressing her against him and patting her on the back. Then they all went into the house, and the young wife took the exhausted child to bed. Karl and Gustav laughed a great deal when they entered the guest-room and saw that Klara and Emma had completely forgotten they were not a pair of schoolboys home for the holidays but grown men now, and one of them a father. Gustav and his wife were therefore given the guest-room ; their little girl slept between them in the flower-decked beds that had been his parents'. Karl would not hear of Emma surrendering her room to him ; he slept in the room left vacant by the farm-hand.

The lonely house grew bright with youth, laughter and happiness. Early in the morning voices rang in greeting and talk ; the mother took her child barefoot to the sunlit hill, where they played together in the grass.

At meals and in the evening, the sons told about their home and their farm (a place at least ten times the size of Treuen) ; they spoke of their herds of cattle, their many labourers, the rich wheat that grew " over there " ; they boasted of the American earth, of its virgin and fertile soil that yielded great crops of fruit, apples, for instance, three times as big as in Germany. And as they compared their present home with the home of their childhood, their lips curled slightly in disparagement. But they also evoked the difficulties of the struggle in the new country, where the work was quite different ; and, as they made this comparison, too, a shade of contempt heightened their smiles. They described their religious life, explained how they must pray at home because there was no church near enough, and how the Bishop drove out when there were children to baptise, dead to bury and tithes to collect. Their conversation was full of the great American cities, of journeys by train, day after day, of the liner and their

voyage across the ocean. They spoke loud and with a touch of braggadocio, as though it were all their own work and as though they had acquired this property unaided ; yet they were not conceited. The servants listened in awe and wonder ; but Klara and Emma scanned their hardy faces with melancholy and astonishment. For these women sought the children who had gone from them long ago ; and though their eyes and hair and full mouths recalled their dead mother, in all her exotic allure, still everything that had endeared them to these lonely women was gone. Karl and Gustav never mentioned the past ; accordingly the pair that had survived that past never mentioned it to them. Klara would gladly have talked with them of things she remembered in the happy days ; but she kept herself sternly in hand and refrained. Thus the visitors brought an atmosphere of joy into the house, but, for Klara and Emma, that joy was mitigated.

Only the father seemed completely satisfied with everything. When the sons talked biggest and laughed loudest, when they seemed most remote to the two women, Christian would rise, smiling, and pat their young, strong shoulders. At this gesture, suddenly, they would become children again and blush and lower their glance. At the same time, Christian kept aloof from the child ; he never petted it or spoke to it ; indeed, he barely noticed it. Neither the child nor its young mother could speak German ; when Karl and Gustav tried to teach them the names of various places near by, they could scarcely repeat them for laughing.

Mother and child laughed and played together all day ; the young wife never raised a finger to work at anything. The little girl was very tall and strong for her age ; her hair, brown like her mother's, was already so long that it had to be tied back with ribbons. Her dark brown eyes were large and bright like her father's ; her voice was extraordinarily deep and powerful. A wild, capricious child, she was, constantly inflicting her whims on those about her. She would have nothing to do with Emma and

Klara, who courted her infant favour with every lure they could think of. Once, when Emma tried gentle and forcefully to catch her in her arms, she screamed and struggled, beating her little hands against Emma's face. Doubtless it was Emma's scars that terrified her, for, from then on, if she happened to meet Emma alone, she would take to her heels. But to Martin she capitulated with all the force of her childish heart. Silent, unrecognised, Martin moved about under the eyes of his childhood companions, listening to their talk and scanned their faces ; but they paid no heed to the stout, heavy-bearded farm-hand whose name awoke no echo in their memory. By tacit agreement, Fritz had not been mentioned ; never a word was spoken that recalled his former existence. But the day after they arrived, the child had run to him, clung to his legs, raised her brown, laughing face to his.

As he took her up in his arms, she rumpled his curly beard with her little hands, laughing ; but suddenly, she grew very serious and kissed him softly on the mouth. The next moment she was laughing again.

She followed him wherever he went, in and out of the stables, over the pastures, even to the limits of the fields if he were working there ; she would pester her mother until she took her to him. Martin rode her on his back or on one of the horses, holding her carefully and letting it trot slowly. He made her a little flute of elder-wood ; he folded paper helmets for her brown head ; one day wove her a garland of cornflowers and red poppies. When her mother set it on her own head in jest and the child began to scream wilfully, he wove another for the mother. In the breaks between work and when he had a day off, the child and Martin were inseparable. They could always be found on the same spot, on the narrow strip of meadow under the hill, by the brook's edge, their heads together as the child watched his hands turning and twisting a tiny mysterious object.

On such occasions, Emma was filled with misgivings. She would invariably join them. Once she tried to take

the child away, but the child yelled and cried and resisted with such violence that Emma had to set her down again. At once, she ran straight back to Martin, and, sobbing bitterly, clung to his knees. After Emma's attempt to part her from her friend, she would stamp and scream whenever she saw Emma keeping her frightened silent watch from afar. But the instant the wild little creature was with Martin, she melted and was all gentleness ; she would sit with him by the hour, quiet as never before, silent and intent over the handiwork of her friend.

They talked with each other in a language neither could understand ; the child asked questions which the man answered with a nod or a shake of the head. Then he would speak to her, hold a long murmured monologue to which the child listened with rapt interest, her dark, brilliant eyes fastened on his beard moving up and down as he spoke. He told her about things " inside "—about his comrades, his work and the Chaplain, and about springtime in the prison yard—he told her how things had been very bad with him once but now were much better. He would never do anything terrible again to children, he said ; he had cried very much for what he had done to little Anna and had wanted to kill himself ; his mother wanted it too ; they had all been after him ; and once it happened to him himself and he was very sick afterwards ; but now everything was all right again. But the others were bad ; the maid plunged her filthy fingers into the milk and lapped up the cream—yes, and she did worse than that—and the other hired-man went off with young girls in the village. All that was wrong ; people should remain children. Karl and Gustav did not know him any more, but he knew them well. They were tall and clever now, and Americans ; but things were better here than in America ; things were better here than at Treuen, too, for horrible events had happened there.

" I mustn't think of them," he said. " I mustn't talk of them."

No, he would not tell her about that part. But he did

tell her about his pets, and whistled the tune he had taught the starlings to sing. He imitated the thin squeak of the mouse that had hidden away from him in the haystack ; he told how in the autumn he meant to catch a hedgehog and tame it. He talked on and on, unburdening his wretched heart of its load of secrets, while his deft fingers worked at the minute toy he had learned to make in prison. His tool was a tiny saw of wire, filed sharp ; with it, out of three cherry-stones, he was making a cart drawn by two horses. The task held the child spellbound for hours at a time.

In spite of the hard work of harvesting, the little thing was finished one Sunday in August, the eve of the sons' departure. As the day was harvest day, too, and they were to celebrate it, things were even more festive than the day Karl and Gustav arrived, what with baking and the slaughter of a calf (which had not happened for many a day), with house cleaning, and garlands of yellow grain and flowers hung about the rooms, and at supper a barrel of currant wine.

In their curious language, Martin and the child had agreed to keep the toy he was making a secret ; it was not until just before dinner on harvest day that she ran in joyfully with the little gift clutched tightly in her hand. They were all gathered in the kitchen, about to take their places at the table. The mother bent down and took the marvellous toy, holding it close to her eyes to see what it was. She was amazed to find a tiny coach, with wheels, spokes, step and door, perfect to the last detail ; there were two elfin horses, with thick manes and tails, harnessed to a shaft with reins of silk. The mother's cry of admiration brought the others crowding round her. Gustav took the toy in his hand.

" By Jove," Gustav cried, " that's wonderful. No one in American can make such things except old prisoners serving long sentences."

As he stood turning it in his hands and his brother joined him to examine it more closely, three pairs of eyes turned to Martin. But Martin leaned against the door,

smiling. Emma's eyes were filled with terror ; in Klara's, there was a plea ; but Christian's were cold and menacing. Martin went on smiling.

" By Jove," Gustav repeated, as he turned towards Martin, the toy still in his hand, " those horses are wonderful ! And the harness is perfect. Where ever did you learn to do that ? "

" I used to do a lot of driving once," Fritz answered gently.

Christian looked away, his heavy lids hiding his eyes.

" Yes, farm-hands in Europe have time for that sort of thing during harvest ; they take things easy. Why do you want to give it to Anna? I'll give you two dollars for it. That's twelve marks and well worth it. What do you say ? "

" No," Martin replied. " It's for Anna."

They put the tiny toy in a box, which the child would not let out of her hands ; at last they all sat down. It was Emma's turn to say grace ; with folded hands they waited for her to begin. But suddenly, in a voice that trembled a little with emotion, she said : " No, let Martin," and sat down again. Martin rose, bowed his head and asked the blessing in his vibrant, rich voice. During supper, Anna, who sat beside him, let him feed her, so that she need not take her hands off the precious box. When the meal was over and they were all shaking hands, Emma laid her left hand for a moment upon Martin's shoulder. Why she did so, she did not know ; but, in her heart, if he was not Fritz, her son, at any rate he was not merely Martin, a stranger.

The following morning the guests left, Christian accompanying them, for he was to see them off on the ship. They took leave of Klara and Emma with much the same rueful embarrassment they had shown on their arrival, for, despite their visit, they were all strangers to one another. To spare little Anna's grief at parting from Martin, they had sent him away on an errand ; now Anna seemed to have forgotten him already. Indeed, there was little to remind her of him, for they had taken her toy from her while she slept and packed it safely away in a trunk. The other hand

harnessed the bays and drove the travellers to town. Martin, standing in a field, watched them turn the bend into the highroad and disappear from sight.

At the port, within view of the great liner that was to bear his sons home, Christian spoke to them and, for the first time, mentioned the past :

" Farewell," he said. " We shall not see each other again. You have found another home. That is right ; that is what I wanted. I am an old man now ; you need not come and visit me any more ; and I shall not visit you. You have always been good lads ; the only way I could prove how much I loved you was by sending you away from me, because that was the best thing for you. Your mother did not believe in misfortune, which was a sin in her. But it lightened her life, while she lived. I bore the brunt of our family's misfortune ; I assumed it for the sake of all of you. My life has been a hard one ; death has delayed too long. All I can say to you, then, is : live as your mother lived if you can, and live far away from me. Keep healthy. God bless you and prosper your work."

He hugged Karl and Gustav to him in a swift embrace, ignoring the mother and child ; then he turned away and disappeared into the crowd on the pier, without waiting for the ship to sail. His words moved the brothers deeply, though they could not grasp their meaning, for their lives were more completely severed from their homeland than Christian knew or could have wished. Nothing of the tragic past dwelled in their memories. If Karl's eyes were now wet with tears, it was because he still loved his father and recalled the first long journey abroad he had made with Christian when they found his little sister and buried her. His grief passed soon, however, and the brothers felt cheerful, as they sped back to their new home where they had found happiness, where work awaited them and a beckoning future. Indeed, they scarcely gave a thought to the homeland as it faded on the horizon, a land grown so strange to them, which they might never see again.

Year followed year, swift and uneventful, rounding out

life to a close on the little farm where Christian, his sister and their old servant still led their patient lives. Work kept their ageing bodies healthy, the satisfaction of labour well done brought them solace ; their hearts were lulled in the peace of death's invisible approach. Martin lived on to be the mainstay of their toil and the witness of their death. As they grew fatigued, his energy redoubled ; as they lost heart, his strength flourished ; his voice sang in their silence and expressed their tremulous prayers. He drove them to church, split wood for the kitchen stove, brought water from the well, attended to the cattle and worked in the fields from morning to night all summer long.

Children were his happiness and joy, and the way he came to them was somewhat curious. The day Karl and Gustav left, a great sadness fell upon Fritz and he longed for the child. He would stand still in the middle of his work as if expecting her to call him, as if listening for her laughter and shouting. It seemed to him that she would come running to him at any moment and cling about him with her little arms, her merry dark face raised to his. He longed for her most in his leisure hours, when he sat all alone beside the brook moving his fingers idly, and murmuring into space the words that surged from his lonely heart, yet softer and more indistinct than ever his ear could catch, for he did not talk to himself.

Then one evening, as he walked among the fields, he found a young hedgehog as he had wished. The animal rolled itself into a ball of quills ; Martin pulled off his coat and, with his foot, eased the animal on to it. He took the new pet to his room and fed it with milk and scraps of meat which he saved from his dinner. When he came up to his room at night and gave a low call, the hedgehog would come out to him with a loud patter and soft grunts and begin to lap the milk he gave it. It was quite tame, allowing itself to be lifted and tossed from hand to hand without once putting out its quills. It was now Martin's only pet ; he began to love it, though he missed the child as sadly as ever.

One Sunday afternoon in October after dinner, when the sun was shining its mildest upon the murmuring brook and the bright meadow, his unhappiness so overwhelmed him that he had to go off. But he went slowly, with lagging steps, along the highroad into the village, shyly skirting the circle of children at their play and stopping at last at the inn which at that hour was empty. He settled his great bulk down at a table, sank his blonde shock-head on his breast, and drank glass after glass of beer. An obscure memory stirred in his mind ; a voice within him said :

" Nobody wants to have anything to do with me."

He drained his glass avidly. When later in the afternoon the taproom filled with guests and noise, he had the host search in his pockets for money to pay the bill. He staggered out into the fresh air and stumbled, fighting against his drunkenness, for his head had become suddenly clear, yet he could not regain control over his huge limbs. He plunged from one side of the road to the other ; then he knelt down, supporting his weight on his hands, in order to raise himself from the ground. But his head was in a daze and he fell, striking his forehead against the stones.

A swarm of children immediately surrounded him, gloating and laughing over the helpless movements of his corpulent body. The older ones threw stones at him ; the little ones would gladly have done likewise, as they approached him with a mixture of fear, curiosity and cruelty, with pebbles in their tiny fists ; but when he moved, they were afraid and retreated with screams of terror. A few men and women with babies on their arms looked on laughing. To the drunken man lying face downward on the ground, the sting of the stones upon his neck and legs was like the soft lash of osier reeds. He raised his head and, looking up, saw the crowd of children round him with their laughing, open mouths. Something of the old evil moved within him ; crawling on all fours to the tavern wall, he struggled first to his knees, then found his feet. He stood leaning against the wall and looked down at the children

who surrounded him still laughing ; his hair and beard were covered with earth.

" Dirty old bear, dirty old bear ! " they shouted, sticking their tongues out at him.

Pain and fury added fuel to the fire in his blood ; his eyes, until then undimmed by the fumes of the liquor, grew dark ; his head rang ; there was a rushing in his ears that deafened him. Hearing and seeing nothing, his heaviness grown light, as though some power outside himself were bearing him along, his hands clenching and unclenching, he rushed at the children clumsily, threatening them with unintelligible words. It was an easy matter for them to skip nimbly out of his way and from a safe distance to torment and mock him further ; but at last one of the men who had stood by to watch the fun, chased them angrily away and led Martin through the village out to the highroad, where, stumbling from tree to tree, ever more bemused, at last, after a journey of two hours, he found himself at home in the darkness.

The others were in the kitchen, filled with secret anguish. They had finished supper ; now they sat still listening. But when the master rose to go and look for his servant, they heard Martin's heavy, floundering footsteps as he passed the house on his way to the stable. Then, for a long time everything was quiet, and they dared breathe again. But suddenly a frightful noise tore through the silence, the din of a tumultuous struggle punctuated with the dreadful rhythm of stamping feet ; and, in the midst of the uproar, a strident animal whine which swelled and rose to a shriek of intolerable agony, like a man's death-cry. Of a sudden, all was quiet again and Martin's voice rose in the long-drawn phrases of a hymn, high, beautiful and clear.

The women turned pale, stricken with fear ; the master sprang up and hurried out to the stable. But when he reached the stair which led up to Martin's room, all was silent. Even the song had ceased. The master turned back and fetched a lantern.

Entering Martin's room, he found him lying across the

bed in a half sleep and breathing heavily. Glassy tears glistened under the lantern light in the curls of his beard ; his legs hung over the edge of the bed ; the soles of his heavy boots were smeared with blood. On the floor the hedgehog lay dead on its back, bleeding, its head and body trampled to pulp. The master brought hay from the stack, wrapped up the dead animal, wiped the blood off the floor and off his servant's boots ; then he returned to the kitchen throwing the hedgehog's body on the dung-heap in the yard as he passed, and said to the women :

" It's nothing, he's only drunk."

Then he went back to Martin. He shook him awake and made him sit up. He scooped up water from the basin in the palm of his hand, moistened his servant's hot forehead, and, seeing his parched lips move beseechingly, brought him the jug to drink from. The servant looked at his master gratefully, his wide childlike eyes swimming with grief and drunkenness. Christian brought the wooden chair to Martin's bedside and sat down beside him.

" Do you know what you have done ? " he asked.

Martin shook his head, sadly and wearily.

" I sent my sons away," Christian went on, " and I took you in. I have provided for you after my death until you yourself die. I have never asked whether you were the murderer or not, for there are greater questions than that. You belong to my life more than my children do. I have given you a new name, a new home, and new work ; whatever I have tried to do for you has been well and has succeeded. God has shown you His grace. But if you must do evil still, I can't take that upon myself any longer. It is not that I have anything more to lose ; but there are other people to consider. And that shall not be upon my head. You had a hedgehog : it was your pet ; you brought it up and took care of it yourself. Now you have trampled it to death ; you have murdered him. Do you know that ? Why did you do it ? "

Martin's gentle voice was racked with sobs as he answered :

Sc

" I don't know what I've done, Master ; I'm drunk. Please forgive me ; I never got drunk before. That's what they try to make you do to get you furious. ' Inside ' I was the best of all of them. I won't bring shame on anyone any more. I am so grateful to you for the work you gave me ; I like it ; it's my own work. The hedgehog's my own, too, I haven't done anything to him, I'll take him away now ; I must set everything to rights."

He heaved a sigh.

" I can't hardly talk, Master, I'm drunk. I'm sorry ; I've never been drunk before. But I understand you, I understand everything, I've understood everything since one day ' inside.' Things are a lot better with me now ; you can tell my mother so. Nobody need kill me any more."

And, summoning all his strength, he struggled to his feet, undid his clothes and exposed himself before his master, looking down at him like a grieving child and said :

" Please forgive me, Master. I didn't do anything. I'm not a murderer any more."

Christian had risen and covered him. Now he bent down and pulled the heavy boots off his servant's feet, undressed him and put him to bed, for he was already fast asleep.

In all the time that followed, Martin laboured even harder than before, but his joy in work was now desperately mingled with an unfathomable sorrow that possessed his entire being. But at last, again on a Sunday, he went back to the village, hanging wistfully on the outskirts of the children's playground. They recognised him and shouted, " Here comes the bear," and rushed, though he had not moved a step further, towards him. Martin bent down to a little girl who had stood still to stare at him, lifted her up and swung her in his arms high in the air, while she laughed and crowed for joy. This brought the other children back ; now he began to play with them, running after the bigger ones, swinging the little ones in his great arms and riding the smallest on his shoulders. One of them fell as she ran, and to dry her tears he promised to make her a flute. Thus Martin became the children's friend. Every Sunday found

him in the village, where they waited for him impatiently and ran to meet him in an eager swarm. He made them all kinds of toys, cages for their pets, whips and tops, flutes and little reed baskets. In winter, he took them sledding and built them figures out of snow.

He gave them sweets which he bought out of his wages. It was a long time before he went to the inn again ; and in the years that followed, twice only he came home drunk. Then the women, listening in terror, heard the stamping of his terrible feet ; but there was no more bloodshed ; he gathered no more pets about him, nor did another living thing to death. In spring and summer, when he was free, it was his joy to choose one child out of the eager crowd, a little girl, and carry her with him to the meadow at the brook-side ; she would sit beside him there as he loosed his pent-up heart of its burden, pouring a torrent of incomprehensible words into her unheeding ear, while he fashioned a toy for her. From afar, Emma would watch them anxiously as they sat there in peaceful communion ; but to the day of her death nothing ever happened again.

She was the youngest and the first of the three to die. In her sixty-first year, a swift, harsh death overwhelmed her. She lay ill in high fever for three days, fighting fiercely to the end. In death, her face had undergone an utter change ; her mouth had fallen, her lips were clenched together in pain as in a vice ; her black eyes, with deep rings under them, shone troublous from amid her livid, evil scars. Profoundly moved, Christian watched over her, looking deep into her face which, in the awful emphasis of death, told what no living soul might know, not even he in whom life had died long ago.

But Klara went out to the brook where a wild-rose hedge was in full bloom, and cut down armfuls of the sweet flowers which she disposed about the head of the dead woman in close, thick clusters ; the rosy shimmer of the blossoms shed a radiance as of life on Emma's face, softening the harsh threatening lines to tenderness. She brought fresh roses every day, until, on the third day, the coffin was closed.

She called Martin to bid his mother farewell. He entered the room, more heavily and clumsily than ever, removed his cap, knelt down, praying and weeping. Then he drew near the coffin and pushed a tiny object between the folded hands ; it was a toy coach and horses, carved out of three cherry-kernels. Thus his mother carried this exquisite memorial of her shame with her into her grave, taking it from him who should never have been her child, yet whom she loved as her child until the last.

The coffin was nailed down ; the master and the carpenter carried it to the wagon which Martin had made ready and which stood waiting in the yard. Klara laid great branches of lilac and of tender green lime and beech over it ; then she took her place in the wagon at one side of the coffin, while Martin sat on the other. Christian drove.

The horses, their bay coats groomed to the shining softness of silk, felt the spring in the golden day ; they could be brought to a slow, seemly pace only with great difficulty. It was a lovely May day ; earth lay about them green and blossoming, the blue sky seemed very distant. Sunshine warmed and gilded the air, filled with the songs of many birds.

The wagon drove through the village and out on to the highroad towards Lintzau, for Christian had wished Emma to lie in the family plot beside Martha and the child. On the other side of the village, the horses began again to whinny and urge ahead ; the coffin was shaken up and down ; Klara had to steady it with her hands. Her eyes, which had grown very dim in these latter years, passed with the same sad peacefulness from the swaying coffin to the beautiful landscape about her and from there to Martin sitting opposite, stout and clumsy, weeping, his round tears running down from his childlike eyes into the curls of his beard. But peace was in him too. The mellow grief he felt for his dead mother, who had become " Emma " for him as for the others, was sweet to him. It was late in the afternoon when they reached the churchyard. The gravediggers took the coffin on their shoulders and carried it to

the open grave, Klara and Christian following. Martin remained behind to watch the horses, for the master had decided in the last moment that he should not see the graves of his wife and child. The waiting pastor blessed the body and read the burial service ; then the coffin was lowered into the grave and covered with earth. Klara and Christian waited until the earth had been heaped up over their old servant ; they looked long at the plot, with the child's grave in the middle, on her right the mother who had borne her, on her left, the mother who had borne her murderer.

" If I should die before you," said Klara to her brother, " let me lie at the child's feet."

" No," he answered, " you shall lie at her head."

And she thanked him with a look of gratitude that was almost joy. Bending down, she measured her length along the three graves and, in placid, glad anticipation, saw her own tomb. " Sleep well, Emma," she said nodding towards the newest grave. " I shall come next week and plant ivy for you ! "

They returned to the wagon ; Martin drove them home. It was night when they arrived.

Klara was now sixty-seven years old ; her buxom figure was still erect, her face almost without wrinkles, her bright hair white only at her temples. But her eyes had grown weak with age and many tears. She grew gayer in time ; a new jesting humour came to her and she laughed much, a soft, aged laugh, even in the presence of her brother for whom her love had always been mingled with awe. But only Martin echoed her good spirits, laughed with her and parried her jests with his own. They had gathered closer round the table to hide the gap Emma had left ; and Klara, Martin and the one-eyed maid divided her work among them. But at the end of every meal, after the table had been cleared, Klara brought the shabby, worn old hymn-book which Emma had loved to read on Sundays when she did not go to church, and laid it in the middle of the table. Thus, though her place was filled, they kept her memory green.

When Klara was eighty-two years old, her eyes were so feeble that she was almost blind ; now again Martin was the first one up in the morning. He called for the mistress at her door and led her downstairs into the kitchen where she prepared the breakfast while the maid was busy in the stables. Klara found her way about the kitchen perfectly, for everything stood in its old familiar place ; but outside the house she was helpless without a guide. In the summer, Martin carved her a whistle out of an elder twig ; she used it to call him when she wanted him to take her to the summer-house on the little hill or bring her down again. The instant the bird-like trilling note of the whistle sounded, Martin would spring up, wherever he was, often leaving his master where they were working together ; and in spite of his ever-increasing stoutness, which not even the hardest toil seemed able to stop, he would run to Klara's side, arriving breathless at the door of the house, where she would be waiting for him. She would call to him laughing, as he came lumberingly on :

" Where's my fat bear ? Come along, bear, and take me to the magic forest."

For since her sight had left her, she often pretended she was a child, blindfold in wonderland, and that one day her eyes would open upon fairy splendours.

" Now we're going up the church-spire," Martin would say, as Klara's steps groped up the little hill. And " Now we're at the top," he would tell her, as she sat down gratefully on the summer-house bench. Then they would both laugh ; he would put the work she had brought with her into her hand and shamble off. Every other Sunday, he took Klara to church, told her the hymn they were to sing and sang with her. She made him tell her what the people looked like, what the women wore ; she was more curious and animated than ever in her life. Occasionally, she would go to her silent brother, feeling him with her hands, kissing him passionately on the lips. Christian submitted and his very submission was an answering caress. When Klara sat alone on the hill in the sunshine, or with the

others by the stove in winter, memories came back to her, but only memories of her childhood, of her mother and father, of her earliest home. She became a child again then, living over the excitement and joys of those happy days. And sometimes the passionate, wistful emotions of her girlhood came to her : she would remember the glorious dreams she dreamed for the life that lay before her, rich with promise. She died in the fullness of age, six years after Emma. She had no illness ; her heart, weary with its burden of years, had forgotten that sorrow once oppressed it ; its last faint beats fluttered to the rhythm of the gentle memories of youth. As a young girl, full of bright dreams, she glided into death, into a golden mist. Death came to her so softly that no one had seen its approach ; she was smiling when she died.

After Klara had been buried, in her turn, as she had wished, life at the farm became hard, silent and barren. The two women, who had brought all warmth and love, were gone ; the air was empty of their endless dreams ; their world was orphaned and forsaken. The maid did her work, but her wages, her heart and her dreaming she carried far from the house. The second man changed often, for most of them found the farm too quiet and forbidding. Martin worked for all who were gone and for all who remained, all week, from morning to night and even on Sunday mornings. When his work was done, he was spent with weariness ; he sang no more ; no pets shared his lonely bed as before ; the village children forgot him, for they seldom saw him now.

Christian worked indefatigably at his side, alone in his infinite solitude. But he had not his strength of old. His tall figure sagged at the knees, now ; his back was bent, his shoulders bowed ; his worn face, now young no longer under the incongruous white hair, seemed to have turned to stone. No one ever saw his eyes ; he almost never raised the heavy lids that covered them.

On one of those autumn evenings when the earth's cold damp breath rises into a wan joyless twilight Christian

stood working in his potato-field. Bent double over the furrows, he was gathering the vegetables out of their dank bed into a sack. When it was full, he swung it up from the ground to load it on to his back, but his strength fled suddenly and his knees gave way. He uttered a low moan as he fell. The thought came to him suddenly that twice in his life his burden had brought him to his knees, yet he had kept both his life and his burden.

Martin, working close by, heard his master's moan and the thud of his fall. He pushed through the gathering darkness looking for him ; when he came to where he lay and bent down to help him, Christian said :

" I must go on living for your sake."

Then he rose to his feet unaided and they carried the sack to the wagon together.

And things came to pass as Christian had said. He, the living dead, must live on to prepare the graves of those whose lives were in his care. He lived on year after year to provide the murderer with home, work and safety for the rest of his days, saving him from going adrift in the world as the farm-hand Martin, a sad, helpless waif among men.

Christian was now seventy-three years old. When, at the beginning of the next year, he took stock of his possessions, he found that the three sums he had set aside for Karl, Gustav and Martin amounted to twenty thousand marks each. This was quite enough to put them beyond danger and want as long as they lived. He therefore hired a man and wife as day labourers to help with the work of the farm. He himself gave up the more strenuous labour, although he was still up from early until late.

Once again Martin, now forty-eight, found leisure to sing, to build hutches and cages, to carve toys for the children. He could sit in the meadow grass by the brook, happy among the little ones to whom he poured out his heart, telling them of things " inside," as the sun shone down on his broad back and curly head. The creatures of the fields played fearlessly about him. He was never

drunk again ; he was utterly happy. His growing stoutness tended to make him indolent, though he still worked with enthusiasm, indeed with all his earlier passion, but he chose tasks at which he did not need to walk. He became unwieldy in his movements ; the only painful thing in his life was that the children perceived his weakness and mocked him. They would torment him and run off ; nor could he follow them. They took the gifts with which he sought their favour, though this did not prevent them from mocking him as cruelly the next day. So, in the end, only the smallest remained to him ; they loved him to take them in his great arms and swing them up and down, to ride jauntily on his shoulders, even though he could not gallop as excitingly as formerly. Martin, standing on one spot, would jog them in a sort of trot, hopping from one foot to the other.

Then the day-labourer's wife bore her first child. During harvest-time, she brought it with her every day, wrapped in a shawl and laid it at the edge of the field ; she would return from time to time to have a look at it. The baby was a boy ; Martin loved him dearly. In secret, he made him a cradle and watched over him when the mother was working far afield ; she would often carry the child to him, glad to be relieved for an hour. It was Martin, not his mother, who taught him his first steps and his first words. He showed him how to fold his hands and say his little prayers ; he sang him to sleep, with his beautiful voice ; he laid him in his own bed while he washed his clothes. Everybody mocked him for it, even the mother, but to Martin it was as though he heard nothing.

The one-eyed maid fell ill ; Martin then assumed the work of the household and cooked for all of them ; when she recovered, he did not give up this task. In the end, he did a woman's work in house and kitchen, scouring the floors in winter and looking after the dairy, while the child played around him. But soon the baby grew into a boy and deserted him in the mornings to go to school. This made him unhappy ; he lived only for the afternoons. But when the child came home, showed him his books and told

him about life at school, he flew suddenly into a rage and sent him away. The thought that the child moved among other people who talked to him and taught him was to Martin repulsive and intolerable ; when the lad came back to the farm every evening Martin never called to him again. The vigilant master, seeing a glint of danger in Martin's child-like eyes, forbade the mother to let the boy come there any more. Martin never again asked for him.

Thus Martin's last love was expended on his work after all. He liked to go about between house and stable, to sit at the stove in the kitchen and attend to the cooking. He helped with the washing and set the table ; he remembered to have cakes baked for holidays, he chose the poultry and praised the roasts which the maid brought from the village. On Sundays, he brought the china plates carefully out of their cupboard to replace the week-day pewter. Gratefully and with a child's simplicity, he enjoyed what was spread before him at life's table. And death came very kindly, very simply to him. It began with a slight weakness, the effect perhaps of some germ that had attacked him in prison ; he knew two years' mild suffering. Busy at his light work he would feel a sweat break out over his whole body ; dizzy and feeble, he would enjoy sitting down by the stove, no matter what hour of the day, and quietly tending the fire. Everything went well with him. The slight cough which attacked him nightly in his room rose without pain in his chest ; the faint vertigo of fever made him sing. But one November day he collapsed in the stable doorway with a pail of milk in either hand ; there was a light bloody froth at his mouth. The master and maid together were unable to lift his great weight ; so Christian pillowed him on hay and sent the maid for a cloth to wipe away the blood. Gradually Martin came to himself and they helped him back into the house. Christian had them open Emma's room, heat it and make up the bed ; he took Martin upstairs and made him lie down. Then he went into the village for a doctor, but on his return he found Martin up again, working in the kitchen.

" It's a pity about the milk, master," he said smiling, " but I couldn't help it."

" You're to sleep upstairs now, always," Christian said. " It's too cold out there for you. And the doctor is coming to see you."

The doctor came and brought a bottle of brown medicine, he examined Martin ; the trouble he said was past. Martin slept in the house in his mother's room ; they heated it every evening. He took his medicine faithfully ; the cough left him, and he went back to his work.

The next summer was warm, beautiful and joyful. Martin spent a great deal of time at the brook, singing to the children gathered about him, telling them about things " inside " : how the pastor had come to him and sat down beside him, speaking just as he spoke from his pulpit in church ; how he had said :

" You must always think of God and keep His Commandments."

And Martin taught the children the Ten Commandments and made them recite them to him. That year he did not help with the reaping but only drove the wagon into the field and brought in the sheaves, as in the old bygone days when he was but a lad. In the autumn his cough came back and he took the medicine the doctor had given him. All through that spring and summer he was well.

But in the third autumn he collapsed in his room, one morning, as he was getting up. Nobody noticed anything amiss. He ate a great deal, grew noticeably stouter ; his breathing became difficult. At night instead of sleeping up in his mother's room, he would go back to his own above the stable and sit upright on the tall haystack, sleeping with hay for cover.

One stormy March night, he died, propped up against the pillows, on his mother's bed. That morning, he had collapsed for the third time ; but somehow he had been able to pick himself up. All day he had coughed incessantly ; his breathing had come with more difficulty than ever. Evening, however, found him gay and laughing. He

drank some hot milk and honey. But the fever was upon him ; he could not walk. In the kitchen doorway, he stumbled ; Christian had to help him upstairs. He lay there, in Emma's bed, very still, his head turned towards the window, his eyes looking out as it rattled violently in the gust of the spring storm. In the flickering candlelight, Christian sat looking at him, his keen eyes scanning the other's face from below lowered lids : it was a gentle face, the serene face of a child with death's light shadow upon it.

" Listen to that window rattle," Martin said, " The first thing to-morrow, I shall have to . . ."

He caught his breath ; a long fit of coughing, with sharp wheezing gasps, shook his frame ; when it was over, his brow was wet with sweat and he fell back, exhausted. Christian tiptoed over to him, wiped the sweat away, lifted the quilt from the invalid's heaving breast, holding it up, so it might warm him without weighing down on him.

" I can't help it," Martin said again, and, starting up, dug his fingers into the bedclothes, tugging silently. His mouth gaped. His breath came panting, with a hiss ; a ghastly shuddering rocked his body as though with voiceless laughter ; under his light beard, his skin flushed darkly as the blood rushed to his face ; his eyes rolled savagely. Then, in profound peace, he fell back on the bed, his limbs relaxed, his lips closed lightly, his heavy eyelids parting to disclose a radiant, mild glance. But when Christian bent over him, no breath fanned the master's face ; the candle which he held in front of Martin's mouth burned evenly with steady flame. Christian pulled the heap of pillows away from the dead man's back and laid him down gently. But, as he reached for his hands, intending to fold them over his breast, he saw a stream of black gushing out of Martin's mouth over his beard. The eyes, still wide open, shone with a glassy brightness.

For the last time in his life, a human feeling urged through Christian's heart. Horror seized him ; he fell back with a cry, appalled, in the end, at the sight of the murderer whom now, in death, he apprehended. But he controlled

himself and found the strength to look on Martin's face. The candle quivered. He watched the blood running over the beard and the soft curls soaking it up like a sponge ; soon the flow ceased and Christian saw the lips were smiling. He went down to the kitchen, fetched warm water and washed Martin's beard ; he dried it carefully, closed his eyes, folded his hands. The tranquil expression on Martin's face calmed the horror in Christian's heart ; he sat down beside his dead servant until the candle burned down. He listened to the storm raging outside.

Martin was sixty years old ; Christian had reached the ripe age of eighty-five. He buried Martin in the churchyard at Schweinachstein, close to his own dead.

Christian Scheffel lived on seven years longer. He made the one-eyed maid heir to what was in the house, so that she might remain with him until he died and attend to his burial. He kept but one hand by him, and though in the last years, dreadful wars and famine brought him many a hardship, he allowed half his land to lie fallow. During the first years of the war, he would still hear from his children in America ; they sent him packages of food and money and news ; all had gone well with them, two sons had been born to Gustav, Karl was still unmarried. The father sent food and money to the village for distribution among the poor ; he read the letters and then burned them. To the very end, his sight and hearing remained unimpaired ; his strength of body and brain never a moment failed. He worked to the bitter end, though extreme fatigue weighed down his movements—a fatigue due not to bodily weakness but to the annihilation of his spirit. He ate little, almost never spoke, never went to the villages or visited the graves of his people. And he never thought of the past ; the memories of childhood that return in old age he banished from his mind. There was in him no sense of hatred or reconciliation, no love or despair : all his emotions were submerged before God and the expectation of that ultimate moment when his soul should behold God's countenance. But, in the very end, he did not think of God

either, for all that he had kept immaculate the flame of divinity in his human breast. He was destined to witness the terrible downfall of the civilisation of his age, its vacuous despair, murders without number and victims innumerable, life trampled down and faith slain. He felt no pity, for his soul moved in space, far beyond the reach of human affairs ; so, at the last, his soul passed from his body, its long, weary sojourn ended.

There was no one with him when he died. The maid had not noticed his absence in the early morning ; when she went to make up his room, she found him dead in his bed. His eyes were closed, his hands folded lightly together. She did not touch him, but, following Christian's orders, went to his desk, took out a letter that lay there, and hastened to the village magistrate. The letter contained precise instructions for his funeral, together with money to defray all expenses. As Christian was buried in Schweinachstein, few mourners followed him to his grave, but many wreaths were sent and his coffin took the road to the churchyard under a mass of flowers. He had died at the beginning of November. On All Souls' day, as people noticed a new grave with the name of Christian Scheffel on the tombstone, the folk of those parts, prematurely grey and bowed by the sorrows and privations of wartime, would go back to the memories of their youth and tell of the tragedy with which Christian's name was linked.

At the request of his heirs, his estate was sold ; his bequests in cash, depreciated owing to the war, went to an orphanage.

A young peasant acquired the farm and married the one-eyed maid, because she owned the furniture. In the bed with its painted garlands of roses, the maid, despite her forty years, bore four sturdy children, who grew up and had their noisy being in the shadow of house and hill. In the parlour, on the sewing-table, which was the maid's chief pride, stood the picture of Anna Scheffel. The maid did not know the story of the little girl, but she liked to

look at the charming little figure with the bright curly head, the sad eyes, the smiling mouth, and the tiny finger raised in warning. And the maid kept the picture, decking its frame with flowers, because she found it rather pretty and she herself had borne only boys.

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